

A HEART FOR GOD: THE GLORY OF GOD IN REVIVAL

A THESIS

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to *The Glory of God*, without which I would have no created purpose in life. The greater my heart affection for God, the deeper my joy in Him, the more His glory is reflected in me. I truly look forward to the day when I will see my Lord Jesus face to face!

Secondly, I also would like to dedicate this thesis to my best friend and loving wife, Nancy. She and I have traveled this sometimes hard but always joyous path towards understanding and embracing the centrality of God in our lives together. Nancy has poured more love and grace into my life than I deserve. The words of this book are just as reflective of God's work in her heart, as they are in mine.

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PREFACE

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8)

Not long after I came to faith in Christ, my heart was drawn to these words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, as something from deep down within me yearned to “see God.” But the problem I faced in that pursuit was the human-centered perspective of my faith in Christ that I held to at that time. I had been taught that the only way I could be “pure in heart” enough to “see God” was to “do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you” (Deuteronomy 6:18). Yet I found that doing what “is right and good in the sight of the Lord” was beyond my human ability. At first I took this struggle within my heart to be the residue of my troubled background, but over time I found that even my mentors, who had been Christians for many years, still struggled with issues of purity of heart and always doing what is right in the eyes of God.

It was then I was drawn to the controversial text found in Romans 7:14-25. Even though I studied and listened to all the arguments regarding the differing views of what Paul had written there, I found the one common reality among everyone I knew and read about, Christian and non-Christian, was that they struggled to some degree with sin in their lives. I came to understand that both believers and unbelievers do struggle, but with very different things. *Non-Christians struggle with God* and their struggles are reflected in their sinful behavior. The primary enemy for them is not sin but God, yet sin is still a large part of their struggle. On the other hand *the primary enemy of Christians is sin*. Though now justified before God in Christ, sin is still their enemy. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful

and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10).

The truth was, though Jesus had changed my heart, I still struggled with sin in some areas of my life. When I tried by my own power and by my own will to "do right," I found myself inwardly torn, even wondering at times if I were really saved. After much prayer and study, and in the seeking of wise counsel, and reflecting on my own experience and the experience of others, and by some shades of enlightenment despite my fallen nature revealed to me through the Holy Spirit – I "stumbled" upon a few truths that gave me freedom and victory in this area. The truth is - *coming to faith in Christ does not make sin go away or solve all our problems*. In fact surrendering to Jesus as Lord and Savior brings with it a whole new set of struggles, because after salvation our hearts become spiritually sensitive to God and to our sin, while before we were numb to both. The reality, then, is that *our struggle with sin is evidence that we are saved*. The problem with too many who claim Christ today is that they don't struggle with their sin, but instead pacify it or hide it or excuse it or redefine it or live with it. If the old saying is true that: "when you come to the end of yourself, you've come to the beginning of God" – then our struggle with sin is then a crucial step in coming to know victory over our sin.

The power that comes in understanding this is that we were created for victory over our sin. Once I came to comprehend the deeper truth that *all of humanity was created in the image of God for the divine purpose of glorifying God* – and that *Jesus Christ came to earth and died on a cross and rose from the dead, so that we might be restored back to God's created purpose* – my heart and life dramatically changed. While I was taught that ministry begins by helping people understand their sin struggle, I found

it much more helpful and empowering to start them at the very beginning before our fall into sin, with God's created purpose for their lives. It is there where the ache of the heart that comes from the lost image of God calls to those who are struggling in their sin. It is the call of God to come home and be restored to that which has been lost in the fall, a fall which we all continue to experience.

Yet while sin can be a complicated issue, the solution is simple: the restoration of the centrality of God and the purpose of His glory, in our hearts and in our lives, through the cross of Christ, is our victory. This became my point of connection in ministry. Living in the shadow of this fallen world, in the depth of my our depravity, there is only one hope we have in the deep, unknown darkness for understanding our own sin: *the power of God through the risen Jesus is what empowers us to live out our original, divinely-created purpose in God.* As we live out our faith between the dream and coming true, whatever depth our sin comes from, or whatever form sin might take, *the biblical answer to sin can only be found in surrendering your life to Jesus, so that you might fully know his life, a life which he lived for the glory God, by the power of the Holy Spirit.* The only thing you can "do right" that will give you a "pure heart" to "see God" – is to *put God at the center of your heart, so that His purpose will work out through you by His power through Jesus Christ.* While I still claim Matthew 5:8 as my life verse, I have come to embrace a deeper truth in Philippians 2:12-13 that reflects this empowerment of victory over sin: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

I wish to thank the many Christian brothers and sisters of various denominational affiliations who surrounded me right after I came to faith in Christ, who spent their time

planting seeds of the truth of the centrality of God in my heart. I also want to extend deep appreciation to Dr. John Piper of Bethlehem Baptist Church for not only the depth of his heart in all that he has written and revealed to me personally, but also for taking time out of his own life to personally talk with me, and help me through a number of deep issues about God and faith and ministry. I am grateful to the churches I have served, who have given me opportunity to learn about God and about myself, and about my call to love those of us who are fallen people as Jesus loves them. In thinking of the countless men, women, and children whom I've talked with, preached to and prayed for in the jungles of the Philippines; in the slums of Brazil; in campgrounds, churches, nursing homes, Bible camps, conferences, and crusade events; and in the many correctional facilities where I've been privileged to serve "the least" of which I am also – I thank you all for opening your heart to God through the weakness of my faith. I am also grateful to Marlin Kottke and Tom Sovereign who taught me how brothers in Christ are to love one another.

I wish also to express deep gratitude to the members of Salem Baptist Church for hearing my heart through my weak voice, and for loving me and supporting me when preaching the truth caused us all a great deal of struggle and pain; and to Alan Rieck, Herb Maves, and John Lingenfelder who blessed me with encouragement as they read through countless pages of my writing for this project. And my love and deepest thanks to my wife Nancy, and my children – Eric, Jennifer, and Micah – who loved, tolerated and encouraged me throughout the process of studying, learning, and writing about the human struggle with God-centeredness. The journey towards the centrality of God through Jesus Christ has been one we have walked together as a family; my heart rejoices that the truth of the glory of God has shaped their lives as much as it has changed mine.

Lastly but most gratefully, I praise my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who died on a cross for my sins, and rose from the dead for the glory of God, so that I might be restored back to my original created place of glory, so that I could once again live out my original created purpose to give glory to our most sovereign and our most supreme God of all the universe. "To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen" (Romans 16:27).

ABSTRACT

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Abstract: This thesis contends that the spiritual decline we are currently experiencing within evangelical community of faith is a result of the removal of the centrality of our created purpose to glorify God from the gospel. In a day when spirituality is popular and fashionable, many have fallen prey to adjusting and redefining the gospel of Jesus Christ in order to attract those in the culture of self-interest we live in. I will prove theologically, biblically, historically, and experientially that this altering and forsaking of our created purpose in God is nothing new; the inbred, sinful, self-centered heart of fallen humanity has always naturally resisted the deep God-centered relationship we were created for.

My goal is to produce a work that would be understandable, readable and available to the non-Christian as well as the community of faith at large, a work that might bring clarity to the critical link between spiritual revival and the divinely created purpose to glorify God within hearts and lives of humanity. Scripture tells us that when God becomes the supreme center of the affections of His people, He is glorified. I believe revival is best defined as the restoration of God's glory in a people whose hearts have become re-centered on God and His purpose for their lives.

INTRODUCTION

THE CALL TO GLORY

Down at the cross where my Savior died
Down where for cleansing from sin I cried
There to my heart was the blood applied
Glory to His name!

Glory to His name! Glory to His name!
There to my heart was the blood applied
Glory to His Name!¹

“Good morning! Welcome to our church! My name is Art, and I was an alcoholic until God rescued me from drinking when I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior! God bless you! Come back again!” As I stood up in the pew at the end of the Sunday morning service, suddenly this man who was sitting behind me grabbed and shook my hand and blurted out this greeting. He looked into my eyes, hard and long. There was both an intensity and a joy within him that I had neither seen nor experienced in any church setting before. My wife Nancy and I had been feeling a spiritual void in our lives and this was our first Sunday morning visiting one of the many small country churches in the rural area of western Minnesota where we had just moved our family. But this would not be our last visit to this small congregation with fundamentalist beliefs. We would come back again and again, for ultimately it would be at this church where my wife and I and our children would come to know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Church and religion had been a part of my life experience up to that point. One side of my family is Catholic, the other Lutheran, and so I was baptized Catholic as an infant, and confirmed Lutheran in my teenage years. Between those two events I attended a

¹ Elisha A. Hoffman (text) and John H. Stockton (music), “Glory to His Name,” *The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration* (Waco, Texas: Word Music, 1986), 527.

number of churches, which varied from mainline to charismatic. While at times I had felt deep emotion about God over the truths of the Bible in the church or through camp experiences or in my own prayer life, yet over time the feeling would pass away and life would go on as usual. From what I had been taught, God had saved me when Jesus died for my sins on a cross, but I never truly felt saved. God always seemed distant, His Spirit seemed inaccessible, and Jesus never seemed to make a difference in my own life. But never in the midst of any of those feelings or experiences was I struck like I was by the spirit of the greeting I received from the man who was sitting behind me in church on that morning. As he shook my hand and spoke with me, I felt an awakening of something from deep within my soul. It wasn't emotion or sentiment or attitude; it was more than a feeling or a mood or a sensation. It was something that harkened me from beyond myself; a yearning, an ache, a hunger for something that I was missing, but yet something which was truly part of me. The search for that something began on that morning.

As my wife Nancy and I began to regularly attend that small church, God began to work in our hearts and in our lives. The people of this small fundamentalist congregation had a love for God, and a passion and commitment for truth, to which we were drawn. Without overtly expressing it, both of us were hungry for what we were hearing and seeing and feeling in this church. Though uncomfortable at first with the boldness of the faith of these people, over time we naturally grew at ease with it all and eventually we both surrendered our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ; and a short time later our two young children also made the same commitment. Because of the normal, desperate needs of a small congregation, it was not long before we as a family found ourselves both committed and immersed in the service and fellowship of this church family.

Hearing the Call to God's Glory

As we read and studied the Bible, and as we learned and served and grew in God's grace, it seemed that God was filling the spiritual void that we had been feeling in our hearts. But three events were about to occur in my life which would dramatically move me deeper into understanding what that void was all about. The first event was an invitation to join four Christian men, none of whom were members of my church but were men I had come to know in our community, for a two-day retreat at a cabin. Our purpose, they told me, was simply to meet with God. In my young faith the idea interested me, and I readily agreed to join them. We covenanted to not speak or listen to one another during our two days together; our focus would be to speak and listen to God, either in personal silence or in open prayer, song, or through the private or open reading of Scripture. Though at the time I felt closer to God than I had ever felt before in my life, the two day experience once again reawakened my awareness of a spiritual void within me. As we silently or openly prayed, as we sang and read the Word of God aloud, and as we meditated in silence, God powerfully came into our midst and filled my heart. And as we looked deeper into God's heart, and as we came to know one another's hearts, tears flowed as we prayed and sang and read and cried and laughed in God's presence. We didn't speak in tongues, no physical miracles occurred, the building didn't shake, and we were not healed. Yet we met with God, and I was forever changed.

But within a week after my time with God and these men at the cabin, I began to feel the void in my spirit again; I struggled as a restlessness grew within me once more. I yearned and ached for something deeper than I was currently experiencing; I wanted more of the God I had experienced in those two days in the cabin. But that desire was not

shared by all of those I had come to know who claimed Christ. The desires I saw being lived out by many Christians were desires for their own comfort and success in life; for others it was a desire for healing or release from struggle or suffering. And while I did find that many Christians seemed to have a passion for God, their passion for Him came not out of their love for God, but out of their duty to Him, and oftentimes that duty was lived out in a way that bordered on spiritual legalism. For those, passion for God was about pleasing Him by following rules, not pleasing God out of their love and desire for Him. For others, I also saw a passion for God that flowed out of what God could give them; their seeking Him was based on receiving gifts from God rather than finding pleasure simply in His presence. It was then that God convicted me that I was in many ways doing those same things; and I realized then that this was the cause for the void, the emptiness I was experiencing in my own heart.

As I wrestled within my spirit as to what this meant, a second event led me into a deeper understanding of God's heart. One of the men who had been part of the two day cabin experience invited me to his church on a Sunday evening to hear a guest pastor speak about a book that he had written. The book was *Desiring God*,² and the pastor was Dr. John Piper. While I knew nothing at that time about John Piper, considering what I was currently wrestling with in my spirit, the title of the book truly did interest me. I don't remember much about what Piper said that evening, but I do remember that there were only about 20 people in attendance, and that I was impressed by how passionate Piper was about God, and that I spoke with him for about twenty minutes afterward, and that ultimately I bought his book. I tried to read the book over the next two weeks, but didn't finish it because I found it hard to read, difficult to understand, and I disagreed

² John Piper, *Desiring God* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1986).

with the basic premise of the book, which is Christian Hedonism.³ For someone such as myself, who was deeply rooted in conservative Christian fundamentalist principles, this concept seemed extremely unbiblical. Everything I had been taught up to that point told me that a hedonist, which is someone whose sole purpose in life is to seek pleasure, could not be a Christian. Seeking pleasure for yourself and being a true Christian did not go hand in hand according to my biblical understanding; there were just too many Scripture references against it, such as: "Whoever loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich" (Proverbs 21:17, ESV).⁴ Christian Hedonism smelled of spiritual self-centeredness; whether it be legalistic duty to please God or seeking self-serving blessing, it all seemed to be about advocating selfishness. I rejected the concept of Christian Hedonism outright and shelved the book for the next couple of years.

Then came the third event in my life which pulled me deeper into understanding the void in my spirit. This event was actually more of a process, a process of God calling me into full time vocational ministry. This process caused me to pull *Desiring God* back off the shelf and study it more intensely. It began as those within the congregation of the small church where my family and I attended came to know that I possessed some limited musical talent (guitar, fiddle, mandolin, banjo, and bass). They encouraged and challenged me to exercise those God-given gifts for the body of Christ, and although reluctant at first, I agreed to do so and began by joining together with a new friend I had found in the church who played guitar. While initially we played just within our own church, over time another Christian musician joined us and we were asked to play and share our faith in Jesus Christ in a number of venues (churches, campgrounds, nursing

³ Piper, *Desiring God*, 19.

⁴ All Scripture references throughout this thesis will be cited from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, Illinois; Good News Publishers, 2001).

homes, prisons, rescue missions, etc.). The focus of our ministry was to lead people to Christ, both the saved and the lost (in the words of an old evangelist, “To comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable”). Our means was to play bluegrass gospel music while giving oral testimony to God’s work in our lives, and we would close our time by giving a gospel message and invitation. From the start I was given leadership and preaching responsibilities, and over time a couple of pastors in our community recognized God’s call in my life and mentored me in preaching and evangelism. Through this process God ultimately called me into full-time ministry, and soon afterwards I attended and graduated from Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. Since that time I have served not only as a pastor in a number of churches, but also as a crusade evangelist, prison ministry leader, short-term missionary, and conference speaker.

Responding to the Call to God’s Glory

As I began to answer God’s call to ministry, as I began to study and learn more about the deep truths of God, as I preached the gospel and called people to Christ, and as I came alongside many who were struggling in their faith and in their life, many of the concepts of *Desiring God* began to come to light. The greatest hurdle, the concept of the self-centered, selfishness of Christian Hedonism, slowly but surely began to dissipate. It was my observation that when the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached, and an invitation to receive Him as Lord and Savior is given, those who come forward are doing so for selfish, self-centered reasons. We respond to the gospel because we are going to personally get something out of it. Coming to Christ is always a selfish act; a desire for individual forgiveness and personal salvation. Responding to an invitation to receive

Jesus as Lord and Savior is an act of spiritual self-centeredness, seeking grace and mercy and love and a new life for oneself. As I studied and sought counsel about this, the only reasoning I could find or was given for responding to the gospel out of our selfishness and self-centeredness, is that we are still under the influence of our sinful nature at that point. But if that were true, selfishness and self-centeredness would no longer have influence over us after Christ comes into our lives. But the reality of my experience was that those who had already responded to the gospel were not exempt from self-centered or selfish behavior; I had yet to meet a born-again evangelical Christian who was sanctified beyond the sin of being self-centered or selfish. The truth was that the Scriptures contain many cautions to God's people about falling into the sin of pride, which is the highest form of self-centeredness and selfishness. Could it be that there is something about pride, about self-centeredness and selfishness that is inherent in our created nature? It was at this point I pulled *Desiring God* back off the shelf and began to study the biblical principles and concepts put forth by Piper about our God-created desires more intensely.

It was in the introduction of *Desiring God* entitled "How I Became a Christian Hedonist" where I immediately found a common fellowship with John Piper in my misunderstanding of the biblical principle of pleasure. He also had learned that the human seeking of pleasure was wrong: "When I was in college I had a vague, pervasive notion that if I did something good because it would make me happy, I would ruin its goodness. I figured that the goodness of my moral action was lessened to the degree I was motivated by a desire for my own pleasure. . . . This was a problem for me because I couldn't formulate an alternative motive that worked. I found in me an overwhelming

longing to be happy, a tremendously powerful impulse to seek pleasure, yet at every point of moral decision I said to myself that this impulse should have no influence.”⁵ This was the journey of my own heart on this issue! Further reading not only connected more deeply with my own thoughts and feelings, but led me into a clearer understanding of the void within my own spirit that I had been struggling with for so long. There is something within us that was created for something more. Piper quotes Blaise Pascal:

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.⁶

John Piper responds to Pascal’s statement by saying: “This statement so fit with my own deep longings and all that I had ever seen in others that I accepted it and have never found any reason to doubt it. What struck me especially here was that Pascal was not making any moral judgment about this fact. As far as he was concerned, seeking one’s own happiness is not a sin; it is a simple given in human nature. It is a law of the human heart as gravity is a law of nature.”⁷ Following his reaction, Piper puts forth another quote, this time from C. S. Lewis:

If you asked twenty good men today what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old he would have replied, Love. . . . The negative ideal of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds

⁵ Piper, *Desiring God*, 14.

⁶Blaise Pascal, *Pascals’s Pensees*, translated by W. F. Trotter (New York, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), 113.

⁷ Piper, *Desiring God*, 15.

the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this . . . is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.⁸

Piper responds to this by saying: “There it was in black and white . . . It is not a bad thing to desire our own good. In fact the great problem of human beings is that they are far too easily pleased. . . . I had never in my whole life heard any Christian . . . say that all of us not only seek . . . but also ought to seek our own happiness. Our mistake lies not in the intensity of our desire for happiness, but in the weakness of it.”⁹ Again, this resonated with my own heart in defining the emptiness in pursuing something lesser than God Himself. One final quote from Pascal put to rest the spiritual void I had been struggling with:

There once was in man a true happiness of which now remains to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.”¹⁰

This is what I had seen in the eyes of the man named Art who had greeted me that one morning in that little church: his deep satisfaction in God! This is the void I had been feeling in my own Christian faith, either suppressing my God-created desire or seeking satisfaction in something other than God Himself. *This was the void that calls people to respond to the Gospel - the personal need to be satisfied in God.* As I was compelled by

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 25-26.

⁹ Piper, *Desiring God*, 16.

¹⁰ Pascal, *Pascals's Pensees*, 113.

this truth to further study, I would find this truth to be the God-created purpose of our lives.

CHAPTER 1

CREATED FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
1 Corinthians 10:31

In ancient China, the people desired security from the barbaric invaders to the north. To get this protection, they built the Great Wall of China. The wall is 30 feet high, 18 feet thick, and more than 1,500 miles long. The purpose of building the wall was to erect an absolutely impenetrable defense - too high to climb over, too thick to break down, and too long to go around. But in spite of its overwhelming immensity, during the first hundred years of the wall's existence China was successfully invaded three times. It wasn't the wall's fault. During all three invasions, the barbaric invaders never climbed over the wall, never broke it down, and never went around it. They simply bribed a gatekeeper and then marched right in through an open door. The wall failed to hold back the invaders because the gatekeeper failed to live out the purpose of the wall.

Many of our pains and struggles and failures in life come about because we fail to live out the true purpose of God for our lives. If we don't know God's purpose for our lives, or if we know God's purpose but are not in alignment with it, then we find ourselves either on a collision course with God's will or living empty lives void of God. Nothing in this world will fill our lives with as much joy and fulfillment and energy and passion and glory as knowing the purpose of God for our life, and embracing that purpose with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength so that we might live fully and wholeheartedly in harmony with God's will and purpose. God reveals His will and purpose for our lives through the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:1-7)

The primary interpretation of this passage is directed toward the nation of Israel; God is promising to sustain them, to deliver them from captivity, and ultimately to claim them and gather them together in His millennial Kingdom. The main point and principle here is to encourage God's people not to fear what man or nature can do to them. This is the command repeated in verse one and verse five – "Fear not, for I have redeemed you... Fear not, for I am with you." After each of these commands – "Fear not" - God gives His reasons why His people should not fear. In verses one through four God tells Israel they should not fear because He has proven Himself faithful in the past - "for I have redeemed you (from the bondage of slavery); I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters (parting of the Red Sea) I will be with you; and through the rivers (crossing of the Jordan River) they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire (the desert experience of the exodus/the consuming fire of God's presence/the three men who were cast into the fiery furnace in Babylon) you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."

"For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your

life.” Here God is saying, “I have conquered and crushed and vanquished other people of the world in order to save you; I have ransomed other nations for you, allowed them to pay your penalty, exchanged their lives for yours because ‘you are precious in my eyes... and I love you.’” Past history proved that God loved His people. In verses five through seven God tells Israel that they should not fear because just as God has proven Himself faithful in the past towards His people, He will also prove Himself to be faithful in blessing them with a glorious future. “Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” In these verses, God reminds His people that they have a bright future and great hope far beyond what they could ever imagine. He promises to gather them together and bring them back once again to the Promised Land. When the Lord returns, this will become a reality; the long conflict between the Arabs and the Jews will be resolved, the Middle East crises will end, and Israel will again rest in peace.

God’s Created Purpose for His People

For what purpose did God bring into existence a people whom He would ultimately regard as precious, a people whom He would love and whom He would choose to occupy the promised land? Verse seven gives us the answer: *God created Israel for His glory.* The existence of Israel was planned and conceived and created because it was God’s desire to reveal His glory through those particular people whom He had created for that particular purpose. Such was God’s plan as He revealed it to Abraham, the great patriarch

of the Hebrew people when God told him, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:1-2). Through the generations that followed, as the world watched the blessing of God work through His people, the power of the presence of His glory in them was revealed. This was God's plan from the beginning. In the first chapter of Genesis, we read that God created the universe, the world, and everything in it. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27). Piper writes:

What is man's purpose here? According to the text, creation exists for man. But since God made man like Himself, man's dominion over the world and his filling the world is a display and imaging forth of God. God's aim, therefore, was that man would so act that he mirrors forth God, who has ultimate dominion. Man is given the exalted status of image-bearer not so he would become arrogant and autonomous (as he tried to do in the fall), but so he would reflect the glory of his Maker whose image he bears. God's purpose in creation, therefore, was to fill the earth with his own glory. This is made clear, for example, in Numbers 14:21, where the Lord says, "All the earth shall be full of the glory of the Lord," and in Isaiah 43:7, where the Lord refers to his people as those "whom I created for my glory."¹

In Genesis 2 we read that God created man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into man's nostrils the life-giving glory of God in creating man in His own image. Not long after, in Genesis 3, man and woman chose a lesser glory than God for their lives and sin entered the world. In verse 15 of that chapter we read of God's promise to restore His glory unto sinful man; in pronouncing judgment on Satan for causing the

¹ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1986). 228.

fall of man, as God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). God would plant His seed, His Son Jesus Christ, into human flesh, who would then come to bruise, to crush, to destroy the consequences of sin by death on a cross, in order to restore God's life-giving glory in the lives of those who would receive him as Lord and Savior.

But reading on in Genesis we find that the darkness of sin grew in the hearts of men. "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). The Bible tells us that the wickedness and evil thoughts continued on as those whom God had created for His glory gathered together and said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). The act of choosing to eat of the forbidden tree in order to be like God, in order to be independent of God and to find wisdom in their own right, began the enslavement of the human race to their own rebellious hearts, an enslavement that hates to rely on God but loves to make a name for itself. As men gathered to build the tower of Babel, God frustrated their efforts for He had a greater plan, a more glorious purpose for His creation. While God created human beings for the purpose of solely depending on Him and of giving Him glory, mankind instead chose to rely on themselves and seek their own glory, to make a name for themselves. So the Bible tells us that God chose one man - Abraham - and promised to achieve the greatest purpose of His glory through Abraham and his descendents. God

would do great things through Abraham's life and through His descendents, in order that God and not man would get the glory.

But the words of Isaiah 43 speak not only to the people of Israel; they also call us deep into God's heart. It is here that the question of the purpose of our lives is answered also: *We were created from the beginning in God's image that we might mirror and reflect and reveal God's glory.* That is our purpose; that is our mission in life. We are called to multiply and fill the earth so that the knowledge of the glory of God would cover the world - "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). Ever since the fall of man, the world has resisted and refused to embrace this divine purpose of God. But ever since the beginning of time, all that God had been doing, is doing, and will do is aimed at seeing that His purpose for us, the purpose of His glory, be fulfilled. And just as Jesus Christ came to fulfill the law of the Old Testament, the New Testament tells us time and time again that we were created in the image of God and that the purpose of our lives is to reflect the glory of His image in our lives:

For a man . . . is the image and glory of God. (1 Corinthians 11:7)

What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet. (Hebrews 2:6-8a)

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
(1 Corinthians 10:31)

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

"The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one." (John 17:22)

Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:11)

God revealed this same purpose to Jonathan Edwards through his own careful and detailed study of the scriptures: “In these places we see that the glory of God is spoken of as the end of God’s saints, the end for which he makes them, i.e., either gives them being, or gives them a being as saints, or both. It is said that God has made and formed them to be his sons and daughters for his own glory, that they are trees of his planting, the work of his hands, as trees of righteousness, that he might be glorified.”² Psalm 19:1 tells us that “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” Out of all that is in the universe, we alone are living beings created in the image of God for the purpose of reflecting His glory.

Defining the Glory of God

What then is the glory of God? The word glory comes from the Middle English *glorie* which was derived from the Latin *gloria*. Our modern English dictionary defines glory in a number of ways: “honor and admiration won by doing something important or valuable; fame; renown; anything bringing worshipful adoration or praise; the condition of highest achievement, splendor, prosperity; radiant beauty or splendor.”³

Glory is one of the most foundationally important theological terms in the Bible; the word is used in the Scriptures more than 350 times. In the Old Testament the Hebrew

² Jonathan Edwards, “A Dissertation Concerning The End for Which God Created the World, Chapter II, Section III” [<http://www.jonathanedwards.com/text/2D/The%20End%20chpt%202.htm>], July 2006. Also fully cited with clarifying footnotes in *God’s Passion for His Glory* by John Piper (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1998), 192.

³ Michael Agnes ed., *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. 4th ed. (Cleveland, Ohio: Wiley, 2002), 604.

word for glory, *kabod*, is rooted in the idea of “weight, heaviness, or worthiness” giving a sense of great importance. Thus, to have glory is to be weighty or heavy or worthy in importance to oneself or to others. “It is used of men to describe their wealth, splendor or reputation (though in the last sense *kabod* is often rendered ‘honour’). The glory of Israel was not her armies but Yahweh (Jeremiah. 2:11). The word could also mean the self or soul (Genesis. 49:6). The most important concept is that of the glory of Yahweh. This denotes the revelation of God’s being, nature and presence to mankind, sometimes with physical phenomena.”⁴

In the New Testament the word *kabod* is translated *doxa*, which in secular Greek means “opinion” or “reputation”. “In certain places in the NT *doxa* refers to human honour (Matthew. 4:8; 6:29), but its chief use is to describe the revelation of the character and the presence of God in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the outshining of the divine glory (Hebrews 1:3). . . . Man, who was made as the image and glory of God (1 Corinthians 11:7) for relationship with him, has fallen short of his destiny (Romans 3:23), which has been fulfilled only by Christ, the second Adam (Hebrews 2:6–9).”⁵

Defining God’s glory in human terms is difficult. The glory of God can only be described in unspoken words of the heart. Defining God’s glory is like trying to describe the word “awesome” or “magnificent” or “beautiful.”⁶ We may try to use words to describe God’s glory but we end up reducing it into some kind of human expression of emotion. And so we are relegated to using words that are beyond our understanding. The glory of God can be said to be the beauty and excellence of His manifold perfection; the

⁴ I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, D. J. Wiseman, ed., *New Bible Dictionary*. 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity, 1996), 414.

⁵ Marshall, Millard, Packer, Wiseman, *New Bible Dictionary*, 415.

⁶ Piper, *Desiring God*, 31.

magnificence and purity of His holiness. Glory is the overflowing fullness of God's infinite goodness. God's glory is the perfect harmony of all His attributes gathered into one infinitely beautiful, intimate, and personal being. In putting all these together, we could say that basically God's glory could be described as a reflection and revelation of Himself. In this the Bible tells us that God's glory is three things:⁷

- 1) God's glory is a reflection and revelation of His *presence*: "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:34).
- 2) God's glory is a reflection and revelation of His *power*: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19).
- 3) God's glory is a reflection and revelation of His *preeminence* (that which is supreme, superior, or dominant about Him): "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

When God says that He created us for His glory in Isaiah 43:7, He is telling us that He created us to *display* His glory, for the purpose that His presence and His power and His preeminence might be known and seen and praised through us to be seen throughout the entire world. In our sinful human state, we will never know the totality of God's excellence or beauty or perfection or magnificence or purity or holiness. The purpose of God is that we would tune our hearts in harmony with His so that our attitudes and actions would reflect His presence, His power, and His preeminence. It is God's desire

⁷ Charles R. Swindoll, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (Anaheim, California: Insight for Living, 2000), 61-63.

that our greatest passion in life would be to know and embrace the depths of God's heart for His glory over all things. When we *live* for His glory, He is given the greatest glory.

CHAPTER 2

LIVING FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

As I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.
Numbers 14:21

What does it mean to live for God's glory? How can we live out something like the glory of God, something which is even beyond our human ability to describe? This is one of the greatest questions of the Christian faith. Some questions about our faith, about God Himself, cannot be answered by anyone but God Himself. God declares, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways... for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). Because His thoughts and ways are higher than ours, it has been said that where God places a period, let no man put a question mark.

But it is still inherent within our sinful nature that we question God and His ways. Throughout the gospel accounts we read that Jesus was continuously being questioned by the scribes, the chief priests, the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees. They did so in an attempt to trick him and trap him in His words, so that they might accuse him and bring about his downfall. Time and time again, as the questions came, Jesus responded in ways that baffled those who questioned him, with a dazzling display of divine knowledge and wisdom and thoughts from on high. Jesus was always putting periods where men had been putting question marks. We read of such a time in the gospel of Mark:

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your

heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Mark 12:28-34)

The questions began as Jesus walked into Galilee and said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel . . . and follow me" (Mark 1:15; 17). The questions continued as Jesus then went about preaching and teaching and healing and casting out demons, living his life for the glory of God. Every time he put a period to God’s truth, men put a question mark. And, in the center of the vast fog of questions Jesus was being asked, we read of a scribe who had been impressed with Jesus’ answers but who puts before Jesus the ultimate question: “Which commandment is the most important of all?” This was actually a burning question in Jesus’ day, as many rabbis and scholars and religious leaders debated which was the most important commandment of not only the Ten Commandments, the Law given by God, but also of the 600 plus man-given laws connected to the Ten Commandants. Among all the other controversies and confrontations and questioning Jesus faced, he was now challenged with the ultimate question – “Which commandment is the most important of all?” This question cut through all the word games and positioning and power struggles, and got to the real heart of the issue.

“‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other

commandment greater than these.” In his answer to the ultimate question, Jesus does not speak of the ten commandments nor of any man-given laws; instead he references a foundational text from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, a text which commands God’s people to love God with everything that is within their being – with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is a command to God’s people to give their full devotion to Him, to not be half-hearted in their love towards God. Furthermore, another command comes on the heels of the command to love God with our all: a command to love our neighbor as ourselves from Leviticus 19:18. Though the context of the passage in Leviticus describes the Hebrew people loving their fellow Jews, Jesus broadened this command in his teachings to include love for all people: those who are in need, those who cross our paths in this life, and even those who are our enemies. Jesus tells us that when we love God we will then also love our enemies, even to the point of praying for them and blessing them.

Living Out Our God-created Purpose

In his answer to the ultimate question “Which commandment is the most important of all?” or “What is the most important thing we are to do in all of life?” Jesus pointed to the means by which we are to live out our God-created purpose in all of life: *we were created for a love relationship with God, a love relationship that is so full of God’s love for us and so full of our love for God, that it reflects the image of God’s glory.* In these words of Jesus, God reveals how we are to live out our God-created purpose: *God created us for the purpose of glorifying Him by joyfully loving Him.* When Matthew records this same answer in his gospel, he also writes that Jesus said, “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:40). Jesus himself

lived out this purpose of relational love. In Matthew 5:17 he said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). Jesus said that all the law and the prophets, all of history, all of life, boils down to this: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” *The ultimate answer to all of our struggles and problems, the answer to our very existence is rooted in the reality that God created us for the sole purpose of glorifying God by joyfully loving Him.* The Bible speaks about our failure to live this way in the book of Revelation. We read of Jesus speaking about this to the church in Ephesus:

I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (Revelation 2:2-5)

A church can have large attendance and a beautiful building; it can be doctrinally pure, and be involved in lots of activity. But when a people of God, when a church, loses its first love, when they lose their passionate love for God – the size of the church, all of its ministry, all of its activity is empty and hollow. Without a deep, intimate love for God, all the church does is meaningless. A people of God, a people who claim Christ, are to be about the business of loving God with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength. The Bible tells us that Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple because they were using God’s house for the purpose of doing their own business. The business of the church is not to be business as the world knows it; the church is to be about the business of the Kingdom. The business of the Kingdom is the business of love relationships: a love

relationship with God that is so deep and so wide and so powerful and so passionate and so expansive that it bursts through and out and over the puny boundaries of our hearts and attitudes and opinions, and on into the hearts and lives of each one who God puts around us. Jesus puts that reality before us when he tells us we are to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength – and then to love others just as much as we love ourselves. “These two commandments are directly interrelated but not identical, for recognition of the sovereignty of God and the loving devotion that is his due is first, and the sole ground and sole dynamic of love to the neighbor.”¹ The connection between loving God and loving one’s neighbor deeply intertwined; our Lord is pointing out there that we cannot love God in isolation from all other relationships in life. “Love is our inner commitment to God that is expressed in all our conduct and relationships.”²

God has created us and placed us on this earth to proclaim the greatness of His love, not the significance of our wants. The love of God is not about our feelings or our sense of security. Our security is in God’s love for us. “Because of the faithfulness of God, Christians can rest assured and be confident in their future status as renewed, forgiven, and transformed individuals.”³ And neither is the love of God about self-esteem as the world defines it. “Secular self-esteem involves valuing oneself over and against God; Christian self-esteem involves valuing oneself in and through Christ.”⁴ In Christ the love of God we know is no longer a human concept of self-esteem but rather divine concept of self-worth which we were created in God’s image for, a self-worth which our Savior

¹ Hugh Anderson, *New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 281.

² David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 476.

³ Joanna and Alister McGrath, *The Dilemma of Self-Esteem: The Cross and Christian Confidence* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1992), 132.

⁴ McGrath, *The Dilemma of Self-Esteem*, 134.

sought to restore back into us on the cross. “The basis of Christian self-esteem is our union with Christ. Christian self-esteem is grounded in our relationship with Christ, established through faith on the basis of the cross of Christ.”⁵ 1 John 4:19 tells us, “We love because he first loved us.” The love of God is about loving God so deeply and intimately, and with the same sacrificial and surrendered love we came to know through Jesus, that dying souls all around us are eternally changed by the life-giving beauty of God’s love they see in us. “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”⁶ God is also most glorified when others see how satisfied we are in God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” If we truly love God, we will live for His glory in all that we do. Those who follow Christ should live out distinctive lifestyles which dramatically reflect Jesus in every way – in the way they conduct their business, in the way they function on the job, and in the way they relate and deal with their families and others they meet. It all begins with loving God: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” When you love God with everything you are, it will compel you to love others: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Piper explains this further:

The first commandment is the basis of the second commandment. The second commandment is a visible expression of the first commandment. Which means this: Before you make your own self-seeking the measure of your self-giving, make God the focus of your self-seeking. This is the point of the first commandment.

"Love God with all your heart" means: Find in God a satisfaction so profound that it fills up all your heart. "Love God with all your soul" means: Find in God a meaning so rich and so deep that it fills up all the aching corners of your soul. "Love God with all your mind" means: Find in God the riches of knowledge and insight and wisdom that guide and satisfy all that the human mind was meant to be.

⁵ McGrath, *The Dilemma of Self-Esteem*, 140-141.

⁶ John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2001), 20.

In other words take all your self-love—all your longing for joy and hope and love and security and fulfillment and significance—take all that, and focus it on God, until he satisfies your heart and soul and mind. . . . God says, Come to me, and I will give you fullness of joy. I will satisfy your heart and soul and mind with my glory. This is the first and great commandment.

And with that great discovery—that God is the never-ending fountain of our joy—the way we love others is forever changed.⁷

When we live out God's glory by loving God and loving one another, we are living out what we were created to be. The apostle Paul writes: "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:11-12). The very fact that God created us for the purpose of sharing in His glory gives our lives great significance. God has determined that we would be meaningful to Him; we were created to reflect His glory and bring Him joy. It is a truly amazing fact that our existence is rooted in the reality that *God created us for the sole purpose of glorifying Him through our love relationship with Him* – receiving love from Him, loving Him in return, loving one another as He loves us, bringing joy to His heart and glory to His name. The Bible says: "The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

To be significant to God is the ultimate end in all of life and all of creation. That is our calling; that is our purpose. Our response to that calling should be to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind. We are called to give God our total love, a love which is to dominate our emotions and direct our

⁷ John Piper, from "The Greatest of These is Love", a message preached at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 7, 1995. [<http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons>].

thoughts, a love which is to be the dynamic and motivation of all our actions. Our relationship with God began with His love for us, as He created us to share in the joy of His glory. Our response is to be a total and absolute life commitment of love to God. When God creates, He creates with relational integrity. Everything He has created is connected and fits together. This is not only true in the physical realm of life, but even more so in the spiritual realm. The Bible tells us that when man sinned, all of creation was affected and groaned. The idea that the sin of one man and one woman could send a disruption of corruption throughout the entire cosmos is an extraordinary picture of the intricate relational connection between all of God's creation. Jan David Hettinga writes:

Jesus gave us the great key to understanding God's plans and priorities when He distilled the Old Testament law and prophets down to this: "'Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39). In this succinct paragraph the Master gives us the basis for understanding that God desires a love relationship with us. It tells us that the bottom line for God is relational. Love is the goal of life. Loving God and each other is the central purpose of our existence. . . . Clearly, God's intention is to offer the truth of the gospel on the silver platter of relational excellence. The loving way Christians behave toward each other is designed to catch the world's attention and create an entry point for the message of the good news.⁸

The evangelical community of faith in our time expounds the common call of the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"" (Matthew 28:19-20). But it is the *commandment*, not the commission that Jesus himself calls "great". The Great Commission erupts and explodes out of the Greatest Commandment as we love others as God loves them, when we love God as we ought.

⁸ Jan David Hettinga, *Follow Me* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1996), 53.

The witness of the power of the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ flows not out of evangelistic passion or methods or systems or organization, but out of a deep and authentic personal love relationship with God. The commission to mission is fulfilled when the Great Commandment is embraced. When the Church and those who claim Christ as Lord and Savior have the proper love relationship with God, they will submit to one another in that same love, and the lost and broken world around us will be found and be healed in Jesus name. We are called and created to reflect and share the love of God we have been given in Jesus Christ. As we joyfully do so, God is glorified both as we are transformed by God's love and as the world is transformed by God's love through us.

Living for the Glory of God

God is glorified when God's people embrace God's absolute sovereign purpose: *God created His people in His image for the purpose of glorifying Him.* When God becomes the center of the affections of His people through the fulfillment of the Greatest Commandment to love God with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength, which then compels them to love others as God loves them – God is then glorified. This then satisfies the spiritual hunger with which every human being was created; “Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” (Isaiah 43:7). Jonathan Edwards once wrote: “The ultimate end longed for in the hearts of saints in their best frames of mind is the ultimate end of creation. . . . in what else can the spirit of the true respect and friendship to God be expressed by way of desire, than in desires of the same end which God himself chiefly and ultimately desires in making them and all other

things.”⁹ In being created for the purpose of God’s glory, the deepest yearning of our hearts then becomes the personal fulfillment of that purpose. This is a lifelong struggle of our hearts, the restlessness of our spirits in being both sinner and saint. Maurice Roberts writes:

Sin is in us but we are not in sin. We belong to a world of perfection shortly to be revealed, but we are at present full of imperfections. We rejoice yet we also groan. Heaven is begun in our hearts, but hell has not yet entirely lost its influence upon us. We are surrounded by angels and yet also tempted by devils. We are perfectly justified but not perfectly sanctified. . . . We are not what we were but we are also not what we would be and shall be. We are absent from the Christ we long to see because we are at present still coming up out of the wilderness.”¹⁰

Once we have become impassioned with the knowledge that God created us for His glory, everything else in life falls feebly short. “With this yearning for God in the heart there is nothing to compare in importance in all of the universe. The measure of a man is the measure of this appetite for union and communion with the living God.”¹¹ Underneath God’s glory, all else is emptiness, a void that a full calendar cannot fill, a void that possessions and position and prosperity cannot satisfy, a void which Pascal called an “infinite abyss.”¹² The irony is that the more full we fill our lives with things that fall short of God’s glory, the more empty our souls become. It’s only as we rid ourselves of these lesser glories, when we surrender them at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ, that the “infinite abyss” is then joyfully filled with the fullness of the glory of God. C. S. Lewis wrote that hope itself and the hunger for something beyond our experience is a result of this God-created yearning of the human heart for glory: “We want something

⁹ Jonathan Edwards, “*A Dissertation Concerning The End for Which God Created the World, Chapter II, Section II*” [<http://www.jonathanedwards.com/text/2D/The%20End%20chpt%202.html>], July 2006. Also fully cited with clarifying footnotes in *God’s Passion for His Glory* by John Piper (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1998), 190.

¹⁰ Maurice Roberts, *Great God of Wonders* (Edinburgh, England: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2003), 50.

¹¹ Roberts, *Great God of Wonders*, 30.

¹² Blaise Pascal, *Pascals’s Pensees*, translated by W. F. Trotter (New York, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), 113.

else which can hardly be put into words – to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to . . . put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch.”¹³ Scripture is saturated with this divine hunger and thirst for our God-created purpose:

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness. (Psalm 17:15)

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1-2)

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1)

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. (Psalm 73:25)

My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. (Isaiah 26:9)

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” (Matthew 5:6)

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35)

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. (Revelation 7:16)

The apostle Paul wrote extensively of this divine tension of desire in his own heart:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. (Philippians 1:21-26)

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 1980), 42-43.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:8-14)

Throughout history, many have spoken and written of this same heart yearning, of this same divine ache, of the same divinely implanted hunger for the fulfillment of God's glory we were created with in this life, just as there are many in our day who are writing of it also. Erwin McManus has written that “the ultimate end of character transformation is not freedom from sin, but freedom to once again be all that God designed for us to be. The Creator of the universe built you to be a creative expression of Himself. . . . This is the ultimate destination, to become the person God dreams of and to share those dreams with others.”¹⁴ David Swartz writes: “Because of Christ my life makes sense; I don't have to grapple with my identity. . . . My life also has meaning that is unshakable in that I need not grope for it among things and ventures of my own construction. In Christ, my life and soul strives toward that for which it was created.”¹⁵ And John Piper observes that: “For God, praise is the sweet echo of his own excellence in the hearts of his people. *For us, praise is the summit of satisfaction that comes from living in loving fellowship with God.* The stunning implication of this discovery is that all the omnipotent energy that drives the heart of God to pursue his own glory, also drives him to satisfy the hearts

¹⁴ Erwin McManus, *Uprising: A Revolution of the Soul* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 253-254.

¹⁵ David Swartz, *Embracing God* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1994), 15.

of those who seek their joy in him.”¹⁶ The universal spiritual hunger of the human experience is simply a reflection of God’s created expression of Himself within our souls, the sweet echo of the glory of God that drives us to pursue a satisfaction of the heart which we can only fully know in the God who loves us and created us for Himself.

In 1909 J. Campbell White, the Secretary of the Laymen's Missionary Movement said: “Most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within his followers except the adoption of Christ's purpose toward the world he came to redeem. Fame, pleasure and riches are but husks and ashes in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for the fulfillment of his eternal plans. The men who are putting everything into Christ's undertaking are getting out of life its sweetest and most priceless rewards.”¹⁷ Though we were created for the glory of God in “Christ’s purpose” for us, living for “his eternal plans” continues to be one of our greatest struggles in life.

¹⁶ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1986), 41.

¹⁷ Piper, *Desiring God*, 185.

CHAPTER 3

THE STRUGGLE TO LIVE FOR GOD'S GLORY

For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it,
for how should my name be profaned?
My glory I will not give to another.
Isaiah 48:11

Our primary God-created purpose, our first and foremost mission in life is to glorify God. When seeking to know the restoration of the glory of God we were created for is not the number-one passion of our lives, God is dishonored and we become so much less than what we could be. Any and all purposes we seek will fall far short if we are not gripped by the roots of our hearts to first pursue God's glory in our own hearts and lives. When we lose the perspective that magnifying God's glory is the purpose of our lives, when the power of the redemption (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) is no longer preeminent and clearly present in our hearts – God's glory no longer shines, His name is profaned, and those who are hopelessly lost in their sin are no longer drawn to a living faith in Jesus Christ. When the glory of God is not passionately embraced, pitiful substitutes arise, and man-centered philosophies that exalt human value distort the work of Christ's redemption and deprecate the purpose and centrality of God in all of life. "The irony of our human condition is that God has put us within sight of the Himalayas of his glory in Jesus Christ, but we have chosen to pull down the shades of our chalet and show slides of Buck Hill – even in the church."¹ Sadly we must face the reality that God-centeredness, the created purpose of God's glory, and His sovereignty in that purpose have been lost in our day. Man and his comfort and pleasure have now become the star in this contemporary drama we call life; it seems that the health, wealth and prosperity of

¹ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1986), 83.

men have become the greater purposes of our faith. God is on stage today, but only in a supporting role as He is being asked to adjust to the many cultural expectations of our time.

But God will not allow His name to be profaned indefinitely. Though He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, He will not tolerate forever those who do not give Him greatest glory, those who regard something else more worthy than Himself. God says in His Word: “I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other” (Isaiah 42:8). The Bible defines sin as a seeking of glories other than God’s glory. Sin is the failure to live our God-created purpose for God’s glory; “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). *Sin is falling short of God’s glory, pursuing glories other than God’s greatest glory.* Scripture speaks of this truth:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:18-25)

“All sin comes from not putting supreme value on the glory of God – this is the very essence of sin.”² We sin when we seek other glories; we sin when we exchange the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man by worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator. “What happens when humans demote their Creator in order to promote themselves? They experience the wrath

² Piper, *Desiring God*, 44.

of God.”³ God’s wrath occurs “when God withdraws His influence and lets the pursuit of one’s own agenda become its own punishment.”⁴ We see this in that after the apostle Paul defines sin in Romans 1:23 (exchanging the glory of God for the glory of humanity and creatures) he then follows by stating three times that “God gave them up” to their sins (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). God condemns sin (“the wrath of God”) by allowing fallen humanity to sinfully pursue other glories than Himself. The penalty for sin, for pursuing glories other than God’s glory, is death, both here and in the hereafter; “for the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Exchanging the greatest purpose of God’s glory for something of lesser value leads to spiritual, emotional, and physical death. The result of preferring other glories over the glory of God we were created for, is that our sovereign God allows us to pursue lesser glories (“the wrath of God”) - which then keeps us from enjoying the glory He created us for in this life and in the life to come. “They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Our Struggle with Sin: The Moth and the Flame

“The very thing that drew me here now repulses me.” These words, spoken to me in my church office one evening, seemed to stun not only me, but also the one who said them. This man and his family had been attending our church for over a year. They had been somewhat involved in the body life of the church but their commitment had been marginal at best, having chosen to be connected to activities and ministries where they could have personal influence while arguing against and rejecting the concept of biblical

³ Jan David Hettinga, *Follow Me* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1996), 82.

⁴ Hettinga, *Follow Me*, 84.

church membership. Our evening together had come at his initiative, and he stated up front that it was his intention to leave the church the next Sunday. When asked to clarify the reason, he explained that he and his wife were uncomfortable when concepts such as confession, repentance and brokenness were preached and taught. “Real Christians”, he said, “have already dealt with those issues when they came to faith in Christ, and addressing them over again is judgmental.” In response, I asked him what had drawn him and his family to the church in the first place. He answered by saying he and his wife were initially drawn to the church because of the God-centered, biblical truth that was being preached and taught – but they had now had enough. “The very thing that drew me here now repulses me.” After a few moments of silence, he then said, “That sounds kind of strange, doesn’t it?” My reply was that it didn’t sound strange, but really sad. After a time of prayer together, he left my office and ultimately left the church.

At first glance this man’s statement may seem strangely contradictory in nature, but in considering the reality of fallen human nature, it really is not. This has been, and still is, the experience of men, women and children from the time of creation, revealed in the lives of those recorded in the Word of God, seen throughout the history of the Christian faith, and still at work in God’s people in the church today. Just as a moth is drawn to the light and heat of a flame, created humanity is naturally drawn toward the heat and light of God, in whose image they are created. Yet there is a tension that battles within each and every human heart – the struggle between the spirit and the flesh, the old and the new, the light and the darkness, the divinely imputed hunger for God and the sinfully imputed yearning for self. This has been the struggle since the fall in Eden.

Sin, the constant struggle between God's glory and other glories, is the constant tension we all experience in life. Prior to the fall into sin in the Garden of Eden, man and woman, in having been created in the likeness and image of God (an event by historic tradition known as *imago dei*), were good by nature. As they enjoyed God in all His fullness, they were relational, rational, and possessed a heart desire for God's will and purpose to glorify Him. "After the fall, then, we are still in God's image—we are still like God and we still represent God—but the image of God in us is distorted; we are less fully like God than we were before the entrance of sin."⁵ At some point man realized that he was dependent upon God for his existence, and in his heart he sinfully sought to overcome his dependence. Adam and Eve displayed this in their attempt to be their own God, by seizing control over their lives to live independently from God. The core of our existence is rooted in this paradox: though we are drawn to God because He created us to be consumed by who He is, in possessing a fallen nature we still continue to be both reluctant and resistant to being fully taken in by the heat and light of the fullness of God's glorious sovereignty and supremacy. This is much like what we see when a moth is drawn to a flame. The divinely created image and purpose within our hearts draws us to the glory of God's reflection, as a moth to the light. But just as the heat deters the moth from a full commitment to the fire of the flame, so does the sinful resistance within the heart of fallen humanity drive us away from the image and purpose of God, driving us instead toward the preservation of the image and purpose of self. "There is within the human heart a tough, fibrous root of fallen life whose nature is to possess, always to possess. It covets things with a deep and fierce passion. The pronouns my and mine . . .

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 443.

express the real nature of the old Adamic man better than a thousand volumes of theology could do.”⁶

The battle between our created purpose to joyfully glorify God and our fallen human desire to seek our own glory in our own pleasure can be seen like the struggle a moth has with a flame. All who truly know Christ wrestle with the reality that desires of the flesh and godly passions cannot peacefully co-exist within the human heart.⁷ Being naturally sinful creatures, our created image and our self-image are often at odds. God’s Word reflects this tension:

Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.
(Ecclesiastes 7:20)

“No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed.” (Luke 5:36-37)

But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.
(Romans 7:6)

“Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness.” (Luke 11:35)

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. (1 John 2:9)

“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (John 3:6)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (Galatians 5:16-18)

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I

⁶ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, 1993), 22.

⁷ David Bryant, *Christ Is All: A Joyful Manifesto on the Supremacy of God’s Son* (New Providence, New Jersey: New Providence Publishers, 2004), 245.

hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Romans 7:14-25)

The Apostle Paul's Struggle with Sin

The battle between the flesh of sinful nature⁸ and the Spirit of God, like that of the draw of the moth to the light of the flame and the moth's resistance to the heat of the fire, is described by the apostle Paul most famously (and intimately) in Romans 7.⁹ Throughout history there has been great controversy concerning this text, specifically regarding Romans 7:14-25 which revolves around whether Paul was speaking of 1) his own post-conversion experience as a normal, mature follower of Jesus Christ, or 2) the experience of an unregenerate Old Testament Jew before becoming a New Testament Christian (which might possibly be himself), or 3) the experience of someone who is imply immature in their faith in Jesus Christ. These three views have been the source of

⁸ Though the term "sinful nature" does not actually appear in Scripture, it is a common term often used to describe the flesh. The Old Testament Hebrew word for "flesh" is *bašār* and its most distinctive use is found in those passages where it designates human weakness and frailty in opposition to God. In the New Testament the Greek word for "flesh" is *sarx* which reproduces most of the Old Testament meaning of *bāšār*. Both *bašār* and *sarx* define "the flesh" as the earthly part of man, but in the New Testament the term is also used to denote the sinful element of human nature that opposes the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:17). *The Nave's Topical Bible* uses "flesh" and "sinful nature" interchangeably and therefore I will do so also throughout this thesis.

⁹ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 110.

much scholarly debate throughout history.¹⁰ Martin Luther took the position that Paul was speaking of his own personal experience as a normal, mature follower of Christ,¹¹ noting that while Augustine also took the same position that Paul was speaking of mature believer, Augustine believed it was someone other than Paul himself.¹² John Calvin also took the same position as Luther, arguing that only true followers of Jesus Christ can experience the battle between our fallen nature and the indwelling Spirit: “That the whole, then, of this reasoning may be more fully and more distinctly understood, we must observe, that this conflict, of which the Apostle speaks, does not exist in man before he is renewed by the Spirit of God.”¹³ A great number of contemporary evangelical commentators, such as J. I. Packer, agree here with Luther and Calvin in that contextually throughout Romans 7 Paul uses the pronouns “I” and “me” to describe the person he is speaking of.¹⁴

The basic crux of the classic controversy in this has been not so much if Paul is speaking of himself, but rather whether or not those who have truly come to faith in Christ would have such a deep continuing struggle with sin as Paul describes in these verses. Those who argue that true Christians no longer have such a struggle, tend to argue that the apostle is either speaking of someone else, or of his pre-conversion experience. Luther saw the depth of the sin struggle spoken of in Romans 7 as a reality of Paul’s post-conversion experience: “The saints are at the same time sinners while they are righteous.

¹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 378-394.

¹¹ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans* translated by J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan and Kregel Publications 1954, 1976), 111.

¹² Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, 112.

¹³ John Calvin, *Commentary on The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to The Romans*, Calvin’s Commentaries, XIX: Originally printed for the Calvin Translation Society, Edinburgh, England. Reprinted by Baker Books. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2003) 262.

¹⁴ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness In Our Walk With God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1984, 2005), 106-107, 222.

They are righteous, because they believe in Christ, whose righteousness covers them and is imputed in them. But they are sinners, inasmuch as they do not fulfill the Law, and still have sinful lusts.”¹⁵ Again Packer agrees with this,¹⁶ as do many others. Calvin states: “But though the will of a faithful man is led to good by the Spirit of God, yet in him the corruption of nature appears conspicuously; for it obstinately resists and leads to what is contrary.”¹⁷

In contrast, Douglas Moo takes the contrary position that Paul is describing his life before he came know Jesus Christ, as a Jew living under the law.¹⁸ While acknowledging that the differing views of this text all have solid arguments, Moo writes that, “most expositors would admit that the exegetical evidence . . . does not all point in the same direction.”¹⁹ But Moo still feels that the weight of proof tilts towards Paul speaking here of those who have yet to come to a true, living faith in Jesus. The third view of this controversy is held by John Stott who initially embraces the same basic premise as Moo in that Paul is describing an Old Testament Jew in Romans 7, but he differs from Moo and others in seeing the description written of here not as someone who is unregenerate, but rather regarding a person who possesses a somewhat shallow, immature faith. Stott contends that in this text Paul is recounting not the life of an Old Testament Jew struggling under the Law, but rather the experience of an Old Testament Jew who is in the process of becoming a New Testament Christian.²⁰ Stott writes: “The right way to applying Romans 7-8 is to recognize that some church-goers today might be termed ‘Old

¹⁵ Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, 115.

¹⁶ Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 221-226.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to The Romans*, 262.

¹⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), 235.

¹⁹ Moo, *Romans*, 239.

²⁰ John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1994) 205-215.

Testament Christians.’ . . . They show signs of new birth in their love for the church and the Bible, yet their religion is law, not gospel; flesh, not Spirit; the ‘oldness’ of slavery to rule and regulations, not the ‘newness’ of freedom through Jesus Christ.’²¹

Thomas Schreiner presents exhaustive research regarding the varying views and ultimately sees each differing opinion possessing its own strength. His final conclusion is that all of the arguments are balanced so finely because Paul is not attempting to distinguish between believers and non-believers in Romans 7, but rather he is seeking to put forth the truth that the struggle with sin continues after conversion because believers still live with the tension of the process (sanctification) between the already (justification) and not yet (consummation) concept of salvation. Schreiner writes:

Galatians 5:16-18 also reveals that Christians still battle the desires of the flesh. This is apparent from Rom. 6:12 and 8:13 as well. Since believers still sin, it is not surprising that they are liable to the same sinful desires that dominate unbelievers. We can properly conclude from Gal. 5:16-18 that salvation is not yet complete for believers and they still fight against sin.²²

It would seem regardless of how one views this text almost all agree that every follower of Jesus Christ will struggle with sin to some degree. This, then, would also be true for Paul, as in Romans 7 he argues both for the goodness of God’s law and the reality of indwelling sin, while at the same time he argues that he is a new creature in Christ, even though he still struggles himself with indwelling sin. This is what I believe we are reading here: *Paul is describing himself as a fully converted Christian in the present tense, who as a believer struggles with and hates sin (which unbelievers do not do) – and who explains his failure in his struggle with sin by confessing his attempts to gain victory in his own strength rather than that by which can only be accomplished by*

²¹ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 210.

²² Schreiner, *Romans*, 390-391.

the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. Moo seems to agree somewhat with this basic premise when he writes: "Whatever our view of Romans 7 might be, then, we need to avoid what I think all interpreters would agree is a misuse of the text: using it to justify sins or stagnation in the Christian life."²³ Paul would write of this sin struggle again in Galatians 5:16-18, but would declare there the need to pursue victory over that sin by the power of God through the Holy Spirit: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."

Moo writes: "My problem with taking Romans 7 as a description of this struggle is that Paul does not just describe a struggle here . . . he also describes a struggle that ends in frustration and defeat (7:21-25)."²⁴ It is there where I respectfully but wholeheartedly disagree with Dr. Moo in his negative interpretation of this section of the passage. Rather than frustration and defeat, the end of Romans 7 is Paul's shout of victory over his struggle with sin: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25). While this is not a declaration of completed victory, is it an assured victory that was bought at the cross of Calvary, empowered by the empty tomb, and comes to us not all at once but in stages: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Romans 7 is not about despair in

²³ Moo, *Romans*, 246.

²⁴ Moo, *Romans*, 245.

our sin struggle but rather about the hope of the indwelling Spirit empowered by the resurrected Jesus Christ.

A closer look at this text gives even further proof that Paul is speaking here of a spiritual battle between his sinful flesh and the spirit of God within his own heart. Previously in verse 12 Paul writes: "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Romans 7:12). Here in verse 14 Paul affirms that again when he tells us that the law (of God) is "spiritual." The law comes from God who is spirit and expresses God's created purpose for all human beings. But then Paul speaks of the opposition to the law of God (Spirit of God) when he writes, "but I am of the flesh, sold under sin" (verse 14). In verse 15 he then speaks of the battle in his own heart: "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." In the verses that follow, Paul then clearly speaks of the battle in his own heart between the flesh and the spirit: "For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing" (verses 18-19); "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" (Romans 7:21-23).

Again we must take note that in relating his personal experience in these verses Paul was describing a present and continuing personal struggle with sins of the flesh as he consistently writes here in the present tense, whereas previously he had been using the imperfect and aorist tenses. The apostle is giving us here a personal picture of the conflicting relationship between our divinely created purpose to glorify God (godly

passions) and our fallen human nature to seek for “the self” (fleshly sins) within the hearts of those who have surrendered their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Paul is telling us that salvation does not mean that God changes or reforms our old, sinful nature; instead God gives us a new nature in Jesus Christ that is imputed into our hearts in order to crucify our old, sinful nature. Yet in this fallen world, as we live in between our initial justification by faith and our ultimate glorification in heaven, both natures are still present within our hearts – the new nature of the Spirit of God and the old nature of our fallen, sinful flesh. While we still have the natural tendency to sin, in Christ we are also given an appetite for holiness. The dynamic for the flesh is still alive, but so also is the yearning for God from the spirit of God that lives within.

In every Christian there is a mixture of good and evil; that the original corruption of nature is not entirely removed by regeneration; that although the believer is made a new creature, is translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, he is but partially sanctified; that his selfishness, pride, discontent, worldliness, still cleave to, and torment him; that they effectually prevent his "doing what he would," they prevent his living without sin, they prevent his intercourse with God being as intimate and uninterrupted as he could and does desire.²⁵

History tells us that the book of Romans was transformational in Martin Luther’s life. He saw within these words written by the apostle Paul the reality of this battle within his own life. It is why within the preface of his commentary on Romans Luther wrote that the seventh chapter “shows how spirit and flesh strive with one another in a man. . . . in order that we may learn rightly to understand the work of slaying sin within us. . . . This contention within us lasts as long as we live . . . the whole man is both spirit and flesh, and he fights with himself until he becomes spiritually whole.”²⁶ Though controversial, I

²⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, “Soteriology”, originally published 1872. (Oak Harbor, Washington: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 223.

²⁶ Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, 23.

believe these words do speak of the struggle the apostle Paul knew and understood to be true within the heart of fallen humanity between the flesh of man and the spirit of God.

The Common Struggle

One of the arguments supporting the position that Paul is speaking of the experience of Christians in Romans 7 is the belief that only born again followers of Jesus Christ will know struggles of the heart. The validity of that argument might seem weak considering the reality that those who have not surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ do have their inner heart conflicts. There is a truth that the inner struggles for both the saved and unsaved find their source in the ache of the divine imprint of conscience that lies within all people we read of in Romans 1:18-20 – and that the emptiness within is revealed outwardly by means of our sinful passions. But the inner conflicts with the hearts of believers and unbelievers is markedly different. For followers of Jesus Christ – sin, the devil and the fallen world we live in are the enemy. Yet for unbelievers, God is the enemy: "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). Hodge states: "There is not in the unrenewed that utter renunciation of self, that looking for help to God in Christ alone, and that delight in the law of God, of which the Apostle here speaks."²⁷ Paul is speaking of the common battle between the old nature (the flesh) and the new nature (Spirit of God) which every individual follower of Jesus Christ experiences. This is why the concept of revival is so vitally important, as in Jesus words, "Be careful lest the light in you be darkness" (Luke 11:35). When our hearts are not properly centered on God our sinful human nature (the flesh) will lead us far astray from

²⁷ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 223.

our God-created purpose to joyfully glorify God (“Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” - 1 Corinthians 10:31). Revival is the restoration of God’s glory in a people of God who have become once again centered on God and on His purpose for their lives.

Richard Lovelace writes of this restoration of God’s glory when he argues that the flesh (sinful human nature) can effectively be overcome by the presence of the Spirit within our hearts (law of God/Spirit of God) – when we recognize the indwelling Spirit is fighting against our flesh, and then respond by re-centering our hearts on God. The problem, Lovelace states, is that the faith of many Christians today is not focused on God but on themselves: “Many in the church today have been made aware of large areas of their characteristic flesh at the level of heteronomy, but have not broken through to a theonomous perception of their needs, and thus are trapped in patterns of dead conformity or angry resistance.”²⁸ *The solution to the problem of the conflict of natures within the hearts of God’s people is that they need to respond to their divinely created call to pursue the glory of God-centeredness.* Yes, it will be a battle, for our sinful nature will be with us until we die; “it is woven of the fine thread of self-life, the hyphenated sins of the human spirit.”²⁹ But God has created us in His image for the purpose of winning the battle. “We must practice living to the glory of God, actually and determinedly.”³⁰

Yet the battle within the heart is not unique to only God’s people. Those who have not embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior still struggle within, though the fight is not between their sinful flesh and the indwelling Spirit but rather between their fallen nature and the created purpose to glorify God that still lies within the hearts of all human beings.

²⁸ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 112.

²⁹ Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 42.

³⁰ Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 113.

There exists a divine tension for non-believers that is not of the Spirit of God, but of the heartache in having lost the likeness and image of God. The first chapter of Romans clearly lays out that the bending and warping of the original *imago dei* has always been the source of untold frustration, anger, violence, and death in the world we live in. It is why the second chapter of Romans begins with the words: "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things" (Romans 2:1). This tension is also the origin and cause of the deep spiritual hunger, the thirst for things beyond ourselves, the yearning for achievement and accomplishment that has permeated the hearts of all fallen humanity, regardless of their relationship with God. For those who claim Christ, the heart is the battleground where the restoration of God's glory is fought.

CHAPTER 4

THE HEART: THE BATTLEGROUND FOR GOD'S GLORY

What hinders us? What is it? What but the presence of a veil in our hearts?
 A veil which remains there still shutting out the light and hiding the face of God.
 It is the veil of our fleshly, fallen nature living on, unjudged within us,
 uncrucified and unrepudiated.
 A. W. Tozer¹

In describing the conflict between the two natures within, Paul wrote: "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being" (Romans 7:22) and went on to observe that at the same time "I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" (Romans 7:23). The conflict between two natures was being fought on the battleground of Paul's "inner being." Most biblical scholars agree that Paul's "inner being" (v.22) and "the law of my mind" (v. 23) are "substantially the same."² This law of his mind, together with the inward man, represents Paul's true self, controlled by God.³ This is supported by Jonathan Edwards who, in his discourse on *The Religious Affections*, argues that this conflict between these two natures – the affection for God versus affection for self – is fought on the battlefield of the "inner man" or "the mind" which he calls "the heart."

God has endued the soul with two faculties: one is that by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns, and views, and judges of things; which is called understanding. The other faculty is that by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers; either is inclined to them, or disinclined and averse from them either as liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting. This faculty is called by various names: it is sometimes called the inclination: and as it

¹ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania; Christian Publications, 1993), 41.

² Marvin. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1985), 82.

³ E. F. Harrison., *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*, (Romans 7:23), Originally published in 1962 by Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois. (Oak Harbor, Washington: Logos Research Systems, 1997).

has respect to actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the will: and the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart.⁴

The Human Heart

Throughout the Word of God, the word “heart” occurs approximately 1,000 times in the Hebrew and Greek, though often disguised in translation. As in our modern day English, the word “heart” is used in the Bible to reference our internal physical organ as well as the core center of one’s “inner being” or “the seat of affections”⁵ – both of good and of evil. Of the heart Edwards writes: “The exercises of this faculty are of two sorts; either those by which the soul is carried out towards the things that are in view, in approving of them, being pleased with them, and inclined to them; or those in which the soul opposes the things that are in view, in disapproving of them, and in being displeased with them, averse from them, and rejecting them.”⁶ As we have already seen in Paul’s life, when both natures (both good affections and sinful affections) are at work at the same time, there is a battle within the heart. The Word of God is replete with references to this battle of the two natures within the heart:

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:26)

Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! (Psalm 119:36)

With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! (Psalm 119:10)

I groan because of the tumult of my heart. (Psalm 38:8)

⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Edinburgh, England; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 24.

⁵ James Swanson, *New Nave's Topical Bible* (heart) (Oak Harbor, Washington: Logos Research Systems, 1994).

⁶ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 24.

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. (Psalm 131:1)

The heart knows its own bitterness. (Proverbs 14:10)

Who can say, “I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin?”
(Proverbs 20:9)

But David’s heart struck him after he had numbered the people. (2 Samuel 24:10)

And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. (1 Kings 11:9)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
(Psalm 51:10)

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. (Mark 7:21-22)

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:21)

Jesus addressed this issue of the battle between the two natures within the heart when he said: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8). The word “pure” here is the word *katharos* in the Greek, a word which means “sincere, upright, virtuous, void of evil.”⁷ “Heart” here is *kardia* which could be defined as the core of one’s “inner being” from which comes all physical, intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual life: and responsively, the center of one’s affections emotions, feelings, moods, and passions.⁸ What Jesus is literally saying here is - “blessed are those whose center, whose core inner being; whose physical, intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual life; whose affections, emotions, feelings, moods and passions are sincere, upright, virtuous, and completely void of evil desire.” It would seem, considering what we already know from Romans 7 regarding our common heart experience, that the “pure

⁷ William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 257.

⁸ Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, 253.

heart” Jesus calls for in Matthew 5:8 is literally impossible for us to know, since in our fallen sinful human nature “no human experience is completely devoid of sin.”⁹ When scripture speaks of God giving a “new heart” (Ezekiel 36:25-27, Jeremiah 24:7) it does not mean that our hearts are completely purged of sinful desire, but rather that God has providentially intervened and sovereignly enabled the fallen sinful heart to be regenerated or “born again.” This is the process by which God renovates the heart, the core of one’s “inner being” by implanting new desires, purposes, and actions, that is expresses in positive response to the Jesus Christ and the gospel.¹⁰ Yet even after we come to this faith – though we are positionally purified before God – we still have within our hearts a nature that is not completely clean and free from any kind of corrupt desires. Though saved, our hearts are polluted with self-centeredness, self-importance and self-desire, which is self-deceiving, self-defiling and self-destructive. Scripture supports the utter depravity of our sinful fallen nature:

Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.
(Ecclesiastes 7:20)

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?
(Jeremiah 17:9)

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.
(Isaiah 53:6)

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. (Isaiah 64:6)

No one does good, not even one. (Romans 3:12)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

⁹ Mark McMinn, *Why Sin Matters: The Surprising Relationship Between Our Sin and God’s Grace* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 38.

¹⁰ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 157.

In light of the truth of God's Word and our shared experience with the apostle Paul in the battle of the two natures within, it would seem that we will never gain the blessing of seeing God in the way we were originally created that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 5:8. Even in Psalm 51:5 we read that our fallen sinful nature began from the moment we were born: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." In light of what is against us, the perfection of a pure heart in this life is beyond achievement. But the reality of what Jesus is saying here is not that we will be blessed when our hearts become perfectly pure. Matthew 5:8 lies within the context of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) where Jesus was addressing the issue of inner heart attitude, and then within the larger context of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) where Jesus was addressing the behaviors that flow out of inner heart attitude. Jesus was teaching that righteous conduct flows out of righteous character, as he sought to expose "the false righteousness of the Pharisees, who taught that holiness consisted in religious actions, and that sin was what you did outwardly."¹¹ What is truly significant here is that Jesus first points out in Matthew 5:1-16 that *true righteousness comes from what is inside the heart*, and he then points out in the remainder of the Matthew 5 (verses 17–48) that *fallen sinful human nature is also in the heart – affirming there are two natures within the heart of man, and that the heart is the battlefield where the war between the spirit of God and the spirit of the flesh is fought.*

¹¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1992), 27.

A Heart for God

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” is not about being perfect in the purity of our hearts, as God’s Word and common human experience clearly point out that this is impossible. Rather Jesus here was addressing the intent, the attitudes, the inclinations, the affections, the motivations of our hearts. Contextually “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” could then be defined as “Blessed are those whose inner motivations of the heart are pure.” This is a hard truth because in His sovereignty God knows our hearts. He knows that our motivations are seldom pure and clean and unpolluted, even when we think they are, because the root of all of our attitudes and motivations is planted deep within the soil of our hearts, where the battle between the flesh of self and the spirit of God rages on. “Even our love is never completely pure. There is always a hint of self-interest or self-absorption.”¹² Packer writes:

There are two opposed desires in every Christian’s makeup. The opposition between them appears at the level of motive. There are desires that express the natural anti-God egoism of fallen human nature, and there are desires that express the supernatural, God-honoring, God-loving motivation that is implanted by new birth. Now because he has in him these oppositional urgings, one holding him back whenever the other draws him forward, the Christian finds that his heart is never absolutely pure, nor does he ever do anything that is absolutely right, even though his constant goal is perfect service of God springing from what the hymn calls “loyal singleness of heart.”¹³

Edwards wrote of this battle within the heart in his *Thoughts on the Revival in New England* and *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* as he reflected on his first hand experience with many who were deeply affected by both the spirit and the flesh during the First Great Awakening. Lovelace explains:

¹² McMinn, *Why Sin Matters*, 39.

¹³ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding our Fullness in Our Walk with God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2005), 33.

Edwards was especially concerned to make clear that fallen human nature is fertile ground for a fleshly religiosity which is impressively “spiritual” but ultimately rooted in self-love. High emotional experiences, effusive religious talk, and even praising God and experiencing love for God and man can be self-centered and self-motivated. In contrast to this, experiences of renewal which are genuinely from the Holy Spirit are God-centered in character, based on worship, an appreciation of God’s worth and grandeur divorced from self-interest. Such experiences create humility in the convert rather than pride and issue in the creation of a new spirit of meekness, gentleness, forgiveness, and mercy. They leave the believer hungering and thirsting after righteousness instead of satiated with self-congratulation.¹⁴

Spiritual experiences which are of “self-congratulation” and “self-love” and “self-interest” ultimately leave one wanting of more spiritual experiences rather than more of God. Because we are creatures who chose sin as our first choice in the Garden, the attitudes and motivations of our hearts will be forever polluted or twisted or warped or tainted to some degree while we walk this earth, always battling for “self” and against the image of God we were created for. One of the clearest stories that I’ve ever heard regarding how sin has warped our hearts comes from a museum where some years ago, despite putting up all sorts of “Do Not Touch” signs, could not keep visitors from touching and ruining priceless furniture and art. But the problem evaporated overnight when a clever museum employee replaced the “Do Not Touch” signs with signs that read: “Caution: Wash Hands After Touching!” The sins of self-centeredness are easily exposed by the reality of our behaviors. “To be specific, the self-sins are self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration, self-love and a host of others like them.”¹⁵ The reality that our sinful nature is alive and well in our hearts is a hard truth for us to acknowledge. We are reminded of this as we read the words of the apostle Paul in Scripture: “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword,

¹⁴ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 42.

¹⁵ Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 42.

piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning *the thoughts and intentions of the heart*" (Hebrews 4:12). This is what Jesus was addressing when he said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" – and in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount as well.

"The primary sense of our calling is that it is not for self but for God's glory."¹⁶ That is our purpose in life. Like the moth drawn to the flame, we are drawn to the light of God because God created us in His image to glorify Him. This is our sole purpose in life in all that we do: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). But like the moth we are resistant to the heat of the flame, because surrendering to the draw of the flame means the self is consumed by the glory of God, and our fallen sinful nature calls us to seek the glory and preservation of the self. This is the battle in King David's heart we read of in the 51st Psalm:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
 according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!
 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,
 so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.
 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.
 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
 and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
 wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
 Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
 Psalm 51:1-12

¹⁶ James Emery White, *Serious Times: Making Your Life Matter in an Urgent Day* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 120.

This is the battle of our hearts – the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, the old and the new, self-centeredness and God-centeredness, our fallen sinful nature and the indwelling spirit of God, good and evil, life and death. Whenever God in His sovereignty sends a powerful spirit of revival into the hearts of His people, this battle of the heart becomes overtly manifest. History is proof of this, as there has always been a significant amount of destructive sinful activity manifested in response to almost every major revival and spiritual awakening on record.¹⁷ As revival is the restoration of God's glory in a people of God who have become once again centered on God and on His purpose for their lives – revival also gives cause for the fallen sinful nature of mankind that lives within the human heart to selfishly rise up and do battle. Lovelace writes:

A great deal of the pathology, confusion, and opposition which have arisen in connection with revival movements can be understood purely in terms of visible, immanent causes. Individual and corporate flesh are certainly the main agents here, adulterating the work among its Christian adherents and reacting against both its virtues and defects among Christian opponents and unbelievers. And since religious renewal is a profound agent for social and psychological change, it is also often an occasion of disorder and resistance.¹⁸

I have found this to be true not only within my own heart, but also within the hearts of those I've been privileged to serve with in ministry. Movements of God that have brought about great movements of glorious blessings among fallen humanity have also wrought aggressive opposition within the hearts of God's people, both individually and corporately. Just like a moth is both drawn to and resistant to a flame, so do revivals throughout history reveal the battle between the two natures within the human heart, through the ebb and flow of surrender and resistance, as God restored His glory in the hearts of His people as they centered their lives on Him and His purpose for their lives.

¹⁷ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 239.

¹⁸ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 254.

“Understanding our day demands understanding the day before. This means history.”¹⁹

Therefore history, as recorded in the lives of God’s people in the Bible, is where we will look next.

¹⁹ White, *Serious Times*, 17.

CHAPTER 5

THE BATTLE FOR THE HEART IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Bible, along with being the inerrant and infallible truth of God, is also a recorded history of great movements of His Spirit among His people – both in the hearts of individuals and in the corporate heart of the nation of Israel. “In the Old Testament times there were great spiritual revivals led by Elijah, Hezekiah, Josiah, and among the people of Nineveh under Jonah.”¹ We also often read of the Hebrew people wandering from their God and His purpose, due to the inner battle within their hearts. In times of spiritual drifting God sovereignly led His people through circumstances and situations which confronted them and challenged them to turn back to their divinely created glory of God-centeredness. Each time the battle within the hearts of individuals and the battle within the hearts of the people as a whole was revealed in how they responded both personally and corporately.

Adam and Eve – The Battle for the Heart Begins

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, discloses that this inner battle between the two natures within the heart of man began in the Garden of Eden. After God created "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) He then said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27). Not long after humanity came into being Satan approached Eve and questioned her regarding God's prohibition that they not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, creating doubt and

¹ Bruce DeMarest, *Satisfy Your Soul; Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1999), 59.

suspicion about God's truthfulness and goodness. Eve yielded to this temptation and in rebellion ate of the tree, and Adam joined her. Sin had now entered the heart and nature of humanity. At the beginning of history Adam and Eve were sinless human beings; there was no sin in the nature of the first human pair. But sin was still a possibility for them as God had created them to be free moral agents. The sin of our first parents was purely volitional; it was an act of the will initiated by their own determination. Their sin, like all other sin, was a voluntary act of the will. But in contrast to our sin, this original internal sin was instigated from an outside source, an evil in the universe that was present prior to the fall of man, an ungodly entity already at work in the world, as the fall of Satan and the evil angels had already taken place. The purpose of the temptation by Satan was to urge independence from God. Satan called into question the truth of God and challenged His authority. He led Adam and Eve to think that they could determine for themselves the difference between good and evil, and control the consequences of their decisions.

Adam fell when he yielded to the temptation of Satan and, together with his wife, ate of the forbidden fruit. The act of rebellion was an act of disobedience, disloyalty, faithlessness, and unbelief. As the command not to eat summarized and brought to a focus all that was involved in righteousness before God, so the transgression epitomized radical apostasy from God. Undivided obedience to God gave way to whole-souled rebellion and complete revolt: the authority of God was repudiated; the goodness of God was doubted; the wisdom of God was disputed; and the truth of God was contradicted. A whole new complex of affections and emotions took possession of the heart and mind of man.²

The essence of the first sin was a deliberate transgressing of a divinely marked boundary; an overstepping of the divine limits, a denial of the divine will, an elevation of the will of man over the divine will of God, a desire to be God himself. Sin entered the world and the hearts of mankind, initiating the bending and warping of the original divine

²Walter Elwell and Philip Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 473.

imago dei within all created humanity away from God, and self-centeredness began to replace God-centeredness. It was then that the two natures of the heart – the hunger for the lost likeness of God and the sinful nature of the flesh - began to do battle within the hearts of Adam and Eve, a battle which created the guilt of sin, the loss of righteousness, and corruption of our whole nature which is commonly called original sin. Thus began the battle within the heart of humanity.

Moses

A reading of the books of Exodus and Numbers tells us that as Moses led the chosen people of God out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt, the hearts of the Hebrew people reflected the battle within that had begun in the garden. Though they rejoiced that God had released them from the burden of subservience in slavery, time and time again they complained and then rebelled when God did not meet their selfish expectations. At one point the internal rebellion against God within the hearts of some people spilled out corporately when “Korah . . . along with certain persons from the tribe of Reuben – Dathan, Abiram, and On – became insolent when they declared that it was time for change in leadership.”³ God sovereignly intervened and instructed the congregation of Israel to move away from the tents of these men, "and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly" (Numbers 16:32-33). One would have thought that this would have squelched complaining and

³ Walter Kaiser, *Revive Us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 19.

rebellion. Yet the human “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (Jeremiah 17:9) and not long afterwards the sinful nature within the human heart rose up and the people rebelled once more.

God knows the fallen sinful human heart, and so one of the most crucial and central commandments He gave them harkened back to the cause of the original fall: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:3-5). Following the people’s approval of the entirety of these commandments, Moses left the camp in the care of Aaron and Hur and ventured once again up the mountain to meet with God. “But when his absence seemed to stretch out longer than the Israelites thought it should, the people panicked”⁴ and their fallen sinful nature rose up once again. “Spiritual rebellion developed in the camp. The prolonged absence of Moses in the cloud of the Shekinah glory of God caused them to wonder if he had died on the mountain. In their minds, it was time to select another leader and fashion a physical replica of God.”⁵ Here, just as in Eden, the human heart reveals its bent to choose self over God when given the opportunity. Edwards writes:

So the children of Israel were greatly affected with God’s mercy to them when they had seen how wonderfully He wrought for them at the Red Sea, where they sang God’s praise; though they soon forgot His works. So they were greatly affected again at mount Sinai when they saw the marvelous manifestations God made of Himself there; and seemed mightily engaged in their minds, and with great forwardness made answer, when God proposed His holy covenant to them, saying, “All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient.” But how soon was there an end to all this mighty forwardness and engagedness of affection! How

⁴ Kaiser, *Revive Us Again*, 46.

⁵ Malcom McDow and Alvin Reid, *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revivals* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 26.

quickly were they turned aside after other gods, rejoicing and shouting around their golden calf!⁶

Not long after they had built and begun to worship a golden calf Moses returned to the camp. Shocked by the rebellion, Moses rebuked Aaron and challenged the people to repent and put God once again at the center of their lives; “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me” (Exodus 32:26). The inner battle between the two natures within the fallen human heart is revealed in how the people responded. The Levites, the tribe of Moses, responded immediately by choosing to embrace God and His supremacy and sovereignty over their lives. But we read that others chose instead to reject God’s supremacy and sovereignty, and as a result on “that day about three thousand men of the people fell” (Exodus 32:28). In fashioning a golden calf for worship those who lost their lives had been attempting to “merge the Hebrew ancestral worship of God with the pagan worship of Egypt” and lower God to the level of the pagan gods of their culture.⁷ In view of His God-centered commandment that they “have no other gods” the Lord rejected their resolve to worship Him in the manner of their own choosing. He was to be the center of their hearts in worship; He was to be their only God. Scripture tells us that after confronting the sinful issues of the heart that had led Israel astray, the Lord renewed His covenant with them, and Israel joyfully responded, as we read in Exodus 35 that the people’s hearts were stirred, willing or moved. God was glorified in this spiritual revival as the Hebrew people once again put God at the center of their lives and purposes.

Though Moses had remained steadfast through this corporate battle of the heart, he later fell victim to the fallen sinfulness within his own heart. The depth of the battle can

⁶ Jonathan. Edwards, *Religious Affections*. (Edinburgh, England; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 58.

⁷ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 26.

be seen in that Moses gave in to the flesh of rebellious sin even after he was gracefully given a personal glimpse of God's glory (Exodus 33:17-23). In Numbers 20:1-13 we read the people of Israel were in need of water. In their time of need God told Moses He would once again cause water to come forth from a rock, as He had done for them previously (Exodus 17:1-7). The Lord commanded Moses to speak to a rock to release the water, but in his self-centered fallen nature, Moses instead selfishly and arrogantly struck the rock twice with his staff, and as a consequence God ultimately did not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land with the nation of Israel (Numbers 20:12).

Elijah

The only spiritual awakening in the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel occurred at Carmel under the leadership of the prophet Elijah and is recorded in the book of 1 Kings. The ruler of that time was King Ahab, who had little interest in religion and even less interest in the God of the Hebrew people; his focus was rather on reinforcing his military strength, building cities, and increasing the economic prosperity of his kingdom. His wife Jezebel, however, had a great deal of interest in religion and was consumed with establishing the worship of Baal as the state religion.⁸ Into this pagan atmosphere God sent Elijah to challenge and confront the deeply sinful nature that His chosen people had decided to embrace. "When Elijah appeared in Israel, the hills and groves were aflame with sacrifices to the pagan gods of Jezebel. . . . Since Jezebel's pagan idol was promoted as the provider of rain and the basic elements of life, Elijah challenged this claim through the famine"⁹ (1 Kings 17:1). God providentially provided a

⁸ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 31.

⁹ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 32.

famine, and after three years God sent Elijah to challenge Ahab to affirm the sovereign power of the true God of Israel over the apparent inability of the false god Baal. But Ahab refused to do so. Empowered by the spirit of God within him, Elijah declared to the king that God would challenge Baal once again, this time to a contest by fire at Carmel. “Since Baal was the sun god, surely he could vindicate himself with fire.”¹⁰

Elijah, King Ahab and his entourage, the people of Israel, and the 450 prophets of Baal gathered together at Carmel. Once the parameters and instructions for the test and trial by fire were established, the prophets of Baal prepared themselves to seek the power of their god. But before they began, Elijah confronted the wayward heart of the people of God regarding the ongoing battle of the natures within their own individual hearts: “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And we read “the people did not answer him a word” (1 Kings 18:21). At that the 450 prophets of Baal began their rituals, using every means at their disposal to evoke a response from their god, revealing the true depth of their depravity as the fallen sinful nature of the human heart went on full public display. “On Carmel, all human religious endeavors were on display as being mere figments of human imagination to give license to engage in carnal behavior.”¹¹ Their attempts began early in the morning and went well into the mid-afternoon, when the priests ceased their ritual contortions in total exhaustion, frustration, and defeat. It was then that Elijah assumed center stage and seeking to restore the image of God back into the hearts of God’s people, he began rebuilding the dismantled altar that had originally been built for worshipping the one true God of Israel. On the site of an abandoned altar once used to glorify God,

¹⁰ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 34.

¹¹ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 35.

Elijah stacked wood for the sacrifice, dug a ditch around the altar, stacked up twelve stones, and then saturated the sacrifice, wood, and stones with so much water that it filled the ditch. Elijah then knelt down and prayed – and fire fell from heaven consuming not only the sacrifice but also the wood, altar, stones and water. “It was total consumption.”¹²

This awesome display of God’s sovereign power – where heaven touched earth and the holy invaded the unholy – created such a response in the individual hearts of the people that they corporately could not contain themselves as they confessed together with one voice. Unlike their lack of reaction when Elijah had first confronted them about the battle of the natures within their hearts this time, with their hearts re-centered on God, they shouted, “The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God” (1 Kings 18:39). “Indeed, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And Israel was not prepared. They had acted as if He were merely one more god on the god-shelf along with the others.”¹³ But now the united confessions and praise of God’s people flowed like the fires from heaven. The language scripture uses implies and signifies a resounding chorus of repeated confession and worship. “God ignited the spiritual fires – long extinguished – once again in human hearts. It was indeed a spiritual homecoming for the prodigal people, and they found that the waiting father yearned for their return.”¹⁴ As each one was moved in heart, they once again placed God at the center their hearts and lives for His purposes, and the divinely created desire of their hearts was satisfied. God was once again glorified in His people as they joyfully worshipped Him in His sovereignty, His supremacy and His preeminence; “The Lord, he is God; the Lord, he is God!”

¹² McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 35.

¹³ Kaiser, *Revive Us Again*, 85.

¹⁴ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 36.

While Elijah was greatly used of God during this spiritual awakening, his personal and corporate experience revealed not only the divine power of the spirit of God but also the rebellion and resistance of the sinful flesh. Corporately, “Elijah learned that when revival erupts, revival leaders encounter severe opposition. Indeed, when God produced this revival, Elijah faced the strongest opposition that he ever encountered.”¹⁵ When the spirit of God moves within the hearts of God’s people to restore them to Himself, the sinful fallen nature of man within individual hearts will move to oppose and resist. Elijah experienced this within his own life. Shortly after the glorious manifestation of God’s power and presence at Carmel, Elijah ran in fear for his life as Jezebel threatened to retaliate for the loss of the prophets of Baal, who had been executed after the challenge at Carmel. Complaining, resistant, and rebellious in his spirit, Elijah made his way to Mt. Horeb where God graciously met and revealed Himself to him. As God spoke to Elijah’s heart, the nature of the flesh gave way to the nature of the spirit, and Elijah once again centered his heart on God, living the remainder of his life powerfully for God’s glory.

Jonah

In the book of Jonah we read of one of the most powerful awakening movements of the Spirit of God recorded in the Bible being led by one of the most rebellious and resistant men in the Bible. In Jonah’s day the Assyrian Empire was the dominant power on earth. The empire itself revolved around the great city of Nineveh. “Throughout the world, the Assyrians were known for cruel and inhumane treatment. . . . The Assyrians had often exercised barbarous cruelty against Israel.”¹⁶ One day God came to Jonah and

¹⁵ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 37.

¹⁶ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 39.

announced that He was going to destroy Nineveh unless the city repented, and that He was commissioning Jonah to deliver that message to the people of Nineveh. But Jonah “did not want to see this city repent and spared from destruction, so he tried to run from God’s call”¹⁷ and boarded a boat headed to Tarshish. As the ship sailed on, God caused a great hurricane-force storm to come upon the boat, and after some discussion and casting lots among the terrified crew, it became clear that Jonah was the cause of their predicament. Jonah confessed that truth and offered that it might be best for all if he was thrown into the sea. After exhausting their alternatives, the crew finally relented and Jonah was thrown over the side of the ship, which immediately caused the winds to stop.

Once in the water, Jonah was swallowed by a large fish. In the stomach of the fish, Jonah prayed and acknowledged the sovereignty of God over his life and over all things, asked for the Lord’s deliverance from his undesirable condition, and sought a full restoration with God. After three days in the stomach of the fish, Jonah was finally released onto land where God commissioned him once again to call the city of Nineveh to repentance. This time Jonah obediently responded and preached the message God had given him, and ultimately he had the privilege of seeing a city of 120,000 people repent¹⁸ as fallen hearts saturated with sinful flesh suddenly were filled with the spirit of God. “Seldom in history has an entire city responded to revival as Nineveh did. The slumbering conscience of Nineveh was awakened to the awesome power of God. What the armies of nations could not do, the message of God did as the entire city was brought to repentance.”¹⁹ The results of this spiritual awakening in Nineveh were amazing: as the

¹⁷ Henry Blackaby, *Fresh Encounter: Experiencing God Through Prayer, Humility, and a Heartfelt Desire to Know Him* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 44.

¹⁸ Blackaby, *Fresh Encounter*, 45.

¹⁹ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 42.

people personally responded in heartfelt repentance their hearts were changed, the corporate heart of the people was transformed and the city was saved from absolute destruction. Yet seeing this, Jonah became furious, as it was rather his selfish desire that the people of Nineveh be destroyed. Scripture reveals Jonah's confession that it was his fear that God would spare them that caused him to initially refuse to go when called. "Jonah did not want mercy for Nineveh; he wanted destruction."²⁰

Though God had used him greatly, Jonah's heart attitudes and resultant behavior revealed that his heart and his life were not centered on God and the glorious purpose for which God had created him. Jonah chose to live in the sinful nature of his flesh rather than surrender to the power of God's spirit within his heart. "He loved God, but not quite fully. He served God, but not completely. Some love, some service, some surrender, but not what really matters: absolute surrender."²¹

Asa

In 2 Chronicles the Bible records a great movement of God's spirit under King Asa, about 35 years after the death of King Solomon and the division of the kingdom. "When Asa became king, Judah was floundering in its carnal condition"²² due to the progressive spiritual decline among God's people under the rule of Solomon, Rehoboam, and Abijah. Taking the throne as a young man, Asa systematically sought to remove the paganism that had infected the people throughout the land. Scripture tells us that one day, as Asa and his army triumphantly returned to Jerusalem from war, they were met by Azariah,

²⁰ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 42-43.

²¹ Lewis Drummond, *Eight Keys to Biblical Revival* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1994), 130.

²² McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 48.

whom the Lord had filled with His Spirit. Azariah reminded Asa and his soldiers that it had been God who had provided their victory; and he then challenged them to respond to God's gracious and providential care: "The Lord is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:2). These words were "used of God as a spiritual sword to cut asunder personal attitudes and to arouse the spiritual resolves in Asa to make whatever sacrifices necessary in order that God should rule in sovereignty over Judah."²³ Asa immediately made a heart commitment to live a God-centered life, a commitment which spread into the hearts and lives of those in his army, and into the hearts and lives of the people of Judah. A simple bold challenge by Azariah, whose heart was filled by the spirit of God, empowered Asa as an individual and the people of God as a whole to overcome the spirit of the flesh within their hearts. As a result they experienced a God-centered spiritual awakening of joyful renewal and restoration to God's fellowship.

But in the midst of this great movement of God's Spirit in the individual and collective hearts of this people of God, the battle within the fallen human heart was at hand. "As in all revivals, every citizen of Judah did not choose to participate, evidenced by Maacah."²⁴ God's Word tells us that, "even Maacah, his mother, King Asa removed from being queen mother because she had made a detestable image for Asherah. Asa cut down her image, crushed it, and burned it at the brook Kidron" (2 Chronicles 15:16). Scripture reveals that within a few years the corporate and personal God-centeredness of heart declined in Judah, as in being their spiritual leader – the Spirit began to give way to the flesh in Asa's own heart. In his fallen nature he put his trust in the king of Syria rather

²³ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 50.

²⁴ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 51.

than God for protection; he imprisoned Hanai, a prophet of God, for his preaching; and instead of seeking the healing hand of God, Asa turned to sorcerers who practiced witchcraft seeking a cure for his physical illness. The fallen flesh resists that which is centered on God and His purposes.

Josiah

In the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles the Bible records the last great movement of God's Spirit among His people before the exile in Babylon. When Josiah became king, the Assyrian Empire was plagued with internal conflict and discord,²⁵ and "Judah was writhing in the worst moral and spiritual condition in her history."²⁶ At the age of sixteen, Josiah had a personal encounter with God which transformed his life. Soon after this he sought to abolish idolatry, remove the pagan places of worship, and cleanse and renovate the temple. In the process of cleansing and renovating the temple, Hilkiah, the high priest, discovered the lost scrolls that contained the Mosaic law. As Josiah heard the words of the law, his heart was moved by the spirit of God. He then "summoned the people to Jerusalem to hear the reading of the Law. As the Law was read, conviction pierced the hearts of the people. . . . Revival began to ignite in the lives of the people."²⁷ As Josiah's heart was overwhelmed with the spirit of God, the heart of the people of God responded in kind. A great celebration ensued as thousands of animals were sacrificed, and God was worshipped and praised with joy, thanksgiving and gladness for seven days. But as in the hearts of other kings before him whom God had used greatly, the sinful flesh of his fallen nature rose up in Josiah's heart to his fatal end. When the king of Egypt went to war with

²⁵ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 54.

²⁶ Kaiser, *Revive Us Again*, 144.

²⁷ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 56.

Carchemish (a Babylonian city on the Euphrates) Josiah, in his pride, intervened without reason. Envoys of the king declared that they had been sent by God to take Carchemish and warned Josiah to not get involved. “Cease opposing God” they told Josiah, “lest he destroy you” (2 Chronicles 35:21). God’s Word then says:

Nevertheless, Josiah did not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to fight with him. He did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but came to fight in the plain of Megiddo. And the archers shot King Josiah. . . . And he died and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. (2 Chronicles 35:22-24)

Ezra and Nehemiah

After the exiles returned to Jerusalem, God’s Word speaks of a great movement of the Spirit of God among His people in 444 B.C. under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, recorded in the Old Testament books that bear their names. This revival had its origin in 458 B.C. when Ezra received permission from King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem. When he arrived Ezra found the moral and spiritual conditions that existed there to be horrific, and he was particularly appalled at the almost universal acceptance among God’s people of intermarrying with those of the pagan culture who lived there. Deeply grieved, Ezra determinedly set about the process of reforming this practice. This was the atmosphere into which Nehemiah, cupbearer for Artaxerxes, arrived in Jerusalem fourteen years later for the purpose of restoring the city. After a midnight inspection of the city, Nehemiah met with those in leadership, shared his assessments, and proposed to them a number of solutions to correction the conditions, the most urgent being the reconstruction of the walls and gates. The leaders agreed and the work began, and fifty-two days later the restoration of the walls and the rebuilding of ten gates was completed. Following the restoration of the walls and gates, Nehemiah assembled the people for a

celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. During the celebration, the Law of Moses was publicly read aloud, and as God's Word filled the air the Spirit of God filled the hearts of individuals who heard it with such conviction that they openly wept, as they had not been living God-centered lives. "They were engulfed with the awesome holiness of God and their own unrighteousness."²⁸ By the power of the spirit of God within them, the mutual weeping turned to communal rejoicing. As hearts of flesh gave way to a heart of the spirit, the corporate heart of God's people was joyfully restored along with the city. *An authentic declaration of the deep truths of God's Word, joined with genuine repentance, which leads to the restoration of God-centeredness into the hearts and lives of God's people, always produces abundant joy.* "This kind of joy is not the cheap imitation of the world; it is a holy and satisfying joy that exceeds all boundaries. It is a joy that has its source in the Lord himself. It is a joy founded on a feeling of being restored and back in communion with him."²⁹ God restored not only the walls and gates of the city but also His divinely created image of glory back into the wayward hearts of His people. By His sovereign grace, God used their brokenness to lead them into His joy.

They had been God's chosen people, but they had not chosen God. He had made them special, but they had not made Him special. God had kept the covenant with them, but they had not kept the covenant with Him. They had been the beneficiaries of God's blessings and provision, but they had responded with presumption, neglect, and complacency. . . . As they responded in brokenness, humility, and obedience, they discovered that the restoration to fellowship with God is more desirous than any earthly possession.³⁰

As we have seen, restoration that finds its source in God naturally tends to give rise to the sin of the flesh. In the midst of the rebuilding process, the sinful flesh within the hearts of some sought to stop the restoration of the spirit. "During the construction

²⁸ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 64.

²⁹ Kaiser, *Revive Us Again*, 168.

³⁰ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 64.

Nehemiah was threatened, taunted, attacked, ridiculed, and tempted as opposition came from Tobiah, Sanballat, and Geshem.”³¹ Also during this time rich noblemen and officials caused a great deal of conflict by oppressing the poor, which delayed the restoration. But the restoration of the heart cannot be stopped by sinful flesh when the spirit of God within embraces its created purpose to joyfully glorify God. Nehemiah proclaimed to the people: “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). As the hearing of the Word of God filled their respective hearts, the joy of God’s glory filled the hearts of His people. “When God’s people understand that Word, there is no containing the holy joy, the deep satisfaction, and contentment that overtake the believing community. . . . We will never find any real joy or satisfaction in this search until our hearts first rest in the God who made us, redeemed us, and revealed his Word to us.”³² The coming of the long awaited Messiah, spoken of in the closing words of prophet Malachi, would reflect both the battle of the two natures and the joy to come.

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” (Malachi 4:1-6)

³¹ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 62.

³² Kaiser, *Revive Us Again*, 169.

CHAPTER 6

THE BATTLE FOR THE HEART IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In New Testament times we read of God sending revival through the ministry of John the Baptist, Jesus and his disciples, culminating in the revival that began in Jerusalem at Pentecost, which poured out across much of the Roman world, and then ultimately expanded to the ends of the earth. During and following the coming of Christ into the world, we clearly see the battle between the two natures, both within the heart of man, and within the hearts of God's people.

John the Baptist

Set within the context of the oppressive brutal rule of the Roman Empire, the Gospels tell us of the appearance of John the Baptist in the region of the Jordan River over four hundred years after the final words written in the Old Testament. The heart of God's people was in great need of revival as the Jewish faith had become mired in a lifeless, hopeless system of rigid, religious structure which had produced enslaving works of traditions and regulations, governed by four main factions that had arisen within Judaism.¹ One group, the Pharisees ("the separate ones"), was comprised mainly of wealthy lay leaders who emphasized Jewish traditions and practices that set them apart from pagan culture. They were politically conservative but religiously liberal; the Jewish population on the whole was most sympathetic to their views. A second group, the Sadducees ("the offspring"), were priests who were politically liberal but religiously

¹ Malcom McDow and Alvin Reid, *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revivals* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 70-73; and Peter Connolly, *Living in the Time of Jesus of Nazareth*. First published by Oxford University Press, Oxford, England, 1963 (STEIMATZKY, LTD.: Bnei Brak, Israel, 1993), 28-31.

conservative. As John the Baptist and Jesus came on the scene, these men still controlled the high Jewish council of the Sanhedrin but they had little influence among the common people. Another group, the Zealots (“zionists”), was not religious but political. They were revolutionaries committed to freeing Israel from living under the rule of Roman authority. Lastly there were the Essenes (“scribes”), scribal separatists who had little or no interest in politics or in warfare. They lived in isolated monastic communities where they studied God’s Word and prepared themselves for the coming of the Messiah. It was into this atmosphere that John the Baptist began his ministry.

With the force of heaven, John preached the theme of the revival, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). John did not offer pious platitudes or trite clichés. He did not recite the oral laws or Jewish traditions of the Hasidim. His message was not enslaved with the religious structure of the Sanhedrin, but was a voice from heaven announcing spiritual freedom. Like a fresh wind blowing across arid wasteland, his messages were saturated with the “hope of glory.”²

The Spirit of God began to move powerfully within the hearts of many of God’s people as John the Baptist called them back to a God-centered life for the purpose of glorifying God through repentance, baptism, righteous living, doctrinal correction, and placing their hope in the coming Messiah. The Bible records a massive movement of heart response among the people as they responded to John’s message and were restored back to God: “All the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mark 1:5). This calling of God through John the Baptist not only stirred and empowered the spirits within the hearts of many of God’s people; it also stirred and empowered their fallen sinful nature: “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other” (Galatians 5:17). Opposition rose up as

² McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 74.

John confronted the moral and spiritual positions of both the secular and religious leaders, challenging their attitudes, their conduct, and their flawed beliefs about God, themselves, and others. Eventually John's God-centered message cost him his life as he publicly reprimanded King Herod and Herodias his wife, who had left her husband (Herod's brother) to take up with the King. "Infuriated by John's bold call for holiness and righteousness in every sphere of the nation's existence, Herod imprisoned John"³ and ultimately had him executed. Not long after John's death Jesus said: "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery" (Mark 7:21).

In the gospel of Matthew we read of one instance in the life of John the Baptist which seems to reflect that battle within his own heart as he sat in prison awaiting death. "Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" (Matthew 11:2-3). Though he did not fail to live out his divine purpose to glorify God, as he neared the end it seems that John the Baptist questioned the reality of who Jesus really was. In the midst of our greatest struggles there are times when our sinful nature seems to be stronger than the spirit that lives within us, revealing the truth of the words of our Lord on the night of his betrayal: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Yet in spite of this Jesus would ultimately also say: "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11:11).

³ Kasier, *Revive Us Again*, 181.

Jesus

The four Gospels affirm that the spiritual movement of God in Palestine that began with John the Baptist intensified and spread under the ministry of Jesus. The message Jesus preached was the same God-centered message as John's: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). In being the fullness of the living God (Colossians 1:15) Jesus came with power from on high. As Jesus powerfully preached and healed and transformed lives, the hearts of men, women and children were filled to overflowing with the Spirit of God. But as the number of changed hearts grew, so did the opposition. Scripture relates that while thousands were drawn to open fields, seashores, and mountainsides to hear his God-centered, glory-soaked, hope-filled message of God's truth, many others – from religious leaders to Roman officials to common people – chose to reject Jesus, by either ignoring him, confronting him, or working to discredit him. Initially opposed by the devil himself after his baptism, Jesus continued to encounter resistance. As he "challenged the religious authority and the teachings of the Sanhedrin, high priests, Sadducees, and Pharisees. . . . the vast majority of the leaders responded with instant opposition."⁴

Over time the critical opposition of the religious leaders turned from animosity to such an absorbing, passionate hatred that they decided to eliminate him. The Gospel accounts are saturated with events and stories which reveal the ebb and flow between acceptance and disapproval, surrender and resistance, the embracing and opposition within the individual human heart – all in response to the God-centered call that flowed out of the Spirit of God through the heart and life of Jesus. Contrasts abound between surrender and resistance as we read of Zacchaeus, who joyfully gave up his wealth for

⁴ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 78.

God (Luke 19:1-10), and the rich young man who sorrowfully refused to part with his treasure (Mark 10:17-22). So while the presence and the power and the preeminence of the living glory of God in the world will revive and restore the hearts of God's people, it is also the cause of conflict within the fallen heart of sinful man. Even many of those who had responded within their hearts and lives to praise and give glory to God for Jesus on account of his miracles, healings, casting out of demons, and in raising the dead back to life would later either oppose him or abandon him in the end. Edwards writes:

How quickly was this ado at an end! All of this nature is quelled and dead, when this Jesus stands bound, with a mock robe and a crown of thorns, to be derided, spit upon, scourged, condemned, and executed. Indeed, there was a loud outcry concerning Him among the multitude then as well as before; but a very different kind; it is not then, "Hosanna, hosanna," but "Crucify, crucify."⁵

Though Jesus was fully God, he was also fully human, and in once instance at the end of his life we get a glimpse of the tension he may have felt between his divine nature and his humanity in the Garden of Gethsemane. Struggling with the violent, brutal death before him, Jesus prayed: "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36). We also read that "being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Luke 22:44). Though we cannot argue that this was a result of the battle between the two natures of the heart as we know it, it is clear that in his last hours Jesus was in a battle not for his soul but for ours – the battle to restore our fallen, sinful, nature back into the image of God's we were originally created for. The battle Jesus fought in the Garden reflected the battle to come on the cross, which ultimately would result in "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*. (Edinburgh, England; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 58-59.

The Disciples

As Jesus progressed in his ministry, he enlisted twelve men to form an apostolic band that would be instrumental in leading the powerful movement of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in the hearts of His people after his death, resurrection, and ascension. The battle within the disciples own hearts was revealed at the crucifixion when, in spite of a pledge of undying loyalty regardless the situation, they either fled for their lives or denied knowing Jesus. The spirit within may be willing, but in the midst of the battle often the fallen heart of man gives in to the weakness of its flesh (Matthew 26:41). In the book of Acts we read that the disciples, following the direction Jesus had given them after his resurrection, gathered together in a room in Jerusalem, and with force that could only be described as a combination of wind, fire, and tongues, the Holy Spirit powerfully entered both the Upper Room and their hearts – individually and collectively. A crowd gathered as the disciples began to speak in the common languages that each understood, giving Peter the opportunity to preach what would be in essence the same message given by John the Baptist and Jesus: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). What followed would once again point to the battle between the sinful nature of man and the spirit of God within the heart of fallen humanity.

The events of Pentecost recorded in the book of Acts affirm the biblical truth that in the presence of a powerful movement of God’s Spirit, people respond within their hearts either in opposition or in obedience. For the disciples the opposition began instantly. Because some of the Jews could not explain the event of Pentecost, they criticized the disciples and accused them of being intoxicated. The hardness of these Jews’ hearts

towards the Spirit of God reveals they were surrendered to the flesh within. But those who were obedient to the call of God-centeredness responded in the spirit by asking, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). And following Peter's call to repent and be baptized, they responded: "so those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). As the spirit within their individual hearts grew, they sacrificially united, coming together for teaching, fellowship, prayer, and worship "and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). But as we have already seen, as the Spirit of God continued to move in their midst and in their hearts, so did the opposition. Within a short time, as many of the temple priests were also moved in heart and spirit to a God-centered faith, the criticisms of many other religious leaders regarding the movement of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost among the people of God turned to harsh persecution.

Acts 3-7 gives the account of a powerful moving of God's spirit among the hearts of many of His people, personally and collectively: the healing of a lame beggar, the transformation of countless people whose hearts were affected by Peter's sermon, an extraordinary answer to prayer, countless healings and casting out of demons, a miraculous release from prison by an angel, and a powerful, holy unity in their midst among the hearts of God's people. But in Acts 3-7 we also read of two arrests, two trials, two imprisonments, and one beating of the disciples; of the lying deceit within the hearts of a husband and wife in the church (Ananias and Sapphira) which resulted in fatal consequences; and the arrest and stoning of Stephen for the boldness of his faith. The central figure responsible for Stephen's death was a Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus, who

would later become the Apostle Paul after a heart-transforming encounter with the resurrected Jesus.

The Apostle Paul

The conversion of the apostle Paul is a dramatic testimony to the reality of the battle of the two natures within the heart of fallen humanity, and the power of the Spirit of God to overcome the spirit of flesh. Paul was a highly educated Jew, who was both a Roman citizen and a Pharisee. He was deeply passionate about his faith, and he acted according to his conviction by zealously and fanatically persecuting Christians, whom he saw in direct opposition to his religion. We read in Acts 8 that he took the most prominent part in the persecution of Stephen and approved of his death. In his zeal he received full power from the Sanhedrin to persecute and arrest followers of Christ. Acts 9 tells us that as he set out to do so in Damascus, Paul had an encounter with Jesus which transformed the most dangerous persecutor of the Christian faith into the greatest promoter of God-centered Christianity the world has ever known. As a supernatural light came down from heaven, the darkness within Paul's heart was dissolved; as the voice of Jesus asked him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4), the sinful flesh within his heart gave way to the spirit of God's love; and as he fell prostrate to the ground, he died to his fallen nature and rose to new life in the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul surrendered to the risen Christ, the divine image of God was restored as he centered his heart on God and God's purposes. Thus Paul could speak out of his own personal experience when he wrote: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul became, by a creative act of the

Holy Spirit within, “a new creature” in Christ Jesus – a re-creation of the image of God he was created for. Because of his personal experience – and through his numerous experiences with other Christians in the early days of the church – Paul could speak of the continuing battle of the two natures within, a battle which he not only addressed in Romans 7, but also in most of his letters to the churches of his day and to the churches throughout history that would follow.

CHAPTER 7

THE BATTLE FOR THE HEART THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The advance of Christianity throughout history is closely associated with revival. The past indicates that great movements of the Spirit of God among His people had great effect in both the hearts of individuals involved and the heart of the community of faith as a whole. As in the biblical awakenings that preceded, the battle between the two natures within the heart of man and within the heart of God's people surfaced repeatedly as the gospel spread throughout the world. In His divine sovereignty, God often used the resistance within the fallen heart of sinful humanity that battled against the spirit of our divinely created image as the means by which He sent revival. Following Stephen's death, an even more intense persecution broke out against those who were powerfully moved in spirit for the cause of Christ. In response, many followers of Christ were forced to leave Jerusalem, which God providentially used to spread the fire of His Spirit in the hearts of many more throughout the world. Lovelace writes that, "Every advance of the kingdom of God has occasioned an explosion of conflict and contention."¹ History reveals that wherever the gospel was being gently shared or passionately lived out, prosecution and persecution would follow – both from within and outside the community of faith. Where the Spirit of God invades, the sinful flesh resists. "The initial surge of Christianity within the Roman Empire, and the battle for the reformation of Western

¹ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 257.

Catholicism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries . . . are . . . major examples”² of this truth.

The Early Church through the Middle Ages

“At the time of Christ’s crucifixion gross spiritual darkness pervaded the entire planet, and the knowledge of God was limited to only a handful of people in a small area of the globe. But from this tiny beginning of 120 believing disciples the gospel spread powerfully throughout the Roman Empire in a few decades.”³ As opposition and persecution spread, so did the power of God’s Spirit among His people. As the church labored through its early years in the power of the movement of God’s Spirit, “the pagans were no match for them. Multitudes accepted Jesus Christ as Savior”⁴ not only by the way the early Christians lived out their lives, but during this time of opposition and persecution, even more so by the way they joyfully gave up their lives. The incredible faith and the physical torture of Polycarp, an eighty-six-year-old bishop, was used of God to create a great outpouring of spiritual response in Smyrna as he gladly embraced death for Jesus. At the martyrdom of Justin in the year A.D. 166 many hearts were turned to God as they observed his glad courage. The God-centered heart and sacrificial passion demonstrated by Leonides, Felicitas, Perpetua, Irenaeus, Gregory, Patrick, Columba, Augustine of Canterbury, Adian, Boniface, and others gave rise to considerable spiritual response to God within the hearts of multitudes of people through this time.⁵

² Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 257.

³ John Armstrong, *True Revival* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2001), 99.

⁴ Malcom McDow and Alvin Reid, *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revivals* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 100.

⁵ McDow and Reid, 102-103.

Augustine of Hippo

One flame that burned most brightly during the early years of the Middle Ages was that within the heart of Aurelius Augustinus, the Bishop of Hippo. Born in North Africa in 354, he wrestled early in life with the battle between the two natures within his heart. “Like Paul, he felt that two warriors, a higher and a lower, were struggling in him for mastery.”⁶ He sought an answer in the Scriptures, but was not satisfied and ultimately became of a follower of Manicheanism, a quasi-Christian religion that saw the universe as the scene of an eternal conflict between two powers, the one good, the other evil, and created humanity as a product of that conflict. According to the Manichean view, the spiritual part of one’s nature was good but the physical part of one’s nature was evil. Over time Augustine found that this belief did not provide a solution to the internal conflict within his heart, as it sought victory through physical abstinence rather than spiritual power; it also rejected the entirety of the Old Testament and the sufferings of Christ in the New Testament. It was at this time in his life that the battle within Augustine’s heart intensified and his inner conflicts became unbearable. When he accepted an influential professorship in Milan, Augustine was thrown “into an intolerable moral contradiction. Here he was, an ardent searcher of the blessed life . . . and at the same time enslaved to lust and power and pride.”⁷ Finally in hearing the influential preaching of Bishop Ambrose, the Spirit of God intervened in his heart as “Ambrose forthrightly declared that Jesus Christ had the power to break the bonds of moral

⁶ Bruce Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1995), 125.

⁷ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (New York, New York: HarpersSanFrancisco, 1998), 190.

failure.”⁸ Augustine once again sought help in the Scriptures and through the words of a child’s voice, God spoke to his heart and he finally surrendered his life to Jesus Christ.

From then on Augustine passionately pursued a God-centered life, and it was but a few years later in 396 that he was called and ordained as Bishop of Hippo, where he served until his death in 430. During this time Augustine dedicated his life to the study of the truth of God’s Word, and wrote much of what is foundational belief in the Christian faith today. He twice addressed the issue of the battle of the two natures within the heart of fallen humanity: first in a debate with Pelagius, and second, in his epic work *City of God*. The debate with Pelagius was a result of Pelagius’ teaching which denied that human sin is inherited from Adam, and taught that humans are free to act righteously or sinfully on their own. This was not only in sharp contrast to Augustine’s own experience, but in opposition to the teachings of God’s Word. Augustine launched a strenuous literary attack on this belief (*Nature and Grace*) “in which he insisted that confidence in human potential only insulates us from an accurate diagnosis of human depravity”⁹ and ultimately this teaching of Pelagius was publicly banished and condemned. Augustine wrote *City of God* after watching Roman refugees in the seaport of Hippo after the fall of Rome soon after the entire empire fell. As Augustine sought the reason for the fall of Rome, his study and contemplation turned to deeper questions of the heart – and ultimately Augustine saw the rise and fall of Rome as representing the struggle between temporal things of this earth (the flesh) and the things of God which are eternal and glorious (of the Spirit). Of Augustine’s *City of God*, Richard Foster writes: “His contrast between the earthly city, formed by the love of self, and the heavenly city, formed by the

⁸ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 190.

⁹ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 197.

love of God, is masterful.”¹⁰ Not only is it masterful, but reflective of Augustine’s deep understanding of the sinful nature of the flesh and the Spirit of God within the fallen human heart.

Augustine’s writings had a profound affect in the years to come. The period of time during which Augustine lived is oftentimes referred to as the medieval era or the Dark Ages; yet those years were anything but dark. “The brightest light illuminating the Middle Ages was the light of Christ, for the medieval world was profoundly Christian. While religious beliefs of the common people were less refined than those of the educated churchmen, their worldview remained thoroughly spiritual. . . . Men and women living during the medieval era knew they lived in open view of the living God.”¹¹ But after the year 1000, the religious life of Europe began to change. Scholarship expanded beyond academics and became a theological movement, and as a result the Roman Catholic Church clarified its theology on a number of points. During this time the crusades increased the political power of the Roman Church, but again due to the nature of fallen humanity, those gains in power also increased corruption within the church. When attempts were made to reform this corruption, the Roman Church responded with suppression and excommunication.¹² Yet many, such as Peter Waldo, Francis of Assisi, John Tauler, John Wycliffe, John Huss, and Girolamo Savonarola sought to set the human heart free from the slavery of the self-centered spiritual oppression of the church.

¹⁰ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 199.

¹¹ James Emery White, *Serious Times: Making Your Life Matter in an Urgent Day* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 19.

¹² McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 113.

“In fact it would be the worldliness of the institutional church toward the end of the Middle Ages that would provide much of the fuel for the Reformation.”¹³

The Reformation

Whereas the many great awakenings of God’s Spirit in the hearts of His people throughout history were in many ways the cause for the Reformation, the Reformation itself provided the atmosphere for the ensuing revivals to come. It was during this time that crucial theological beliefs, essential doctrinal understandings and church practices regarding faith, Scripture, salvation, preaching, God’s sovereignty, and music were either altered or corrected. These changes and others brought forth by Martin Luther, Huldreich Zwingli and John Calvin set the foundation for the spiritual awakenings that were to come. The crux of what these men sought to reform in the church was rooted in the battle within the fallen heart of humanity: God-centeredness versus man-centeredness. This was the conflict of the day felt within the heart of many individuals and within the heart of the institutional church – which can be seen most clearly in the life of Martin Luther.

Martin Luther

Born in 1483, the son of a Saxon miner, Martin Luther felt the call of God in his life after being knocked to the ground by a bolt of lightning at the age of 22. Obsessed with guilt over his sinful nature, he entered an Augustinian monastery and became a dedicated monk. Driven by the battle between the two natures within his heart - a profound burden over the depth of his own depravity and an overwhelming sense of the glory of God’s holiness and majesty – he pushed the health of his body and soul almost beyond limits to

¹³ White, *Serious Times*, 21.

get his heart right and centered with God. But no amount of penance or advice from his colleagues or superiors could still the deep conviction within Luther's heart that he was a miserable, doomed sinner.¹⁴ Assigned as the chair of biblical studies at Wittenberg University, Luther ultimately found the answer he sought in the truth of God's Word. It was there his heart became captivated by the words Jesus had spoken as he hung on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). As Luther considered why Jesus could feel forsaken even though he was sinless, he came to understand that the answer lies in the fact that Christ was sharing in the reality of mankind's separation from God as Jesus had taken on the identity of fallen sinful humanity. A new and revolutionary picture of the sovereignty of God and the depravity of man began to develop in Luther's conflicted heart. In 1515 – while pondering the words of Romans 1:17 ("The righteous shall live by faith") – Luther finally came to see beyond the battle of the two natures within his own heart, finding the victory he had so long hungered for in the heart of God: *the fallen sinful nature of the flesh within the heart of humanity can be defeated only by the Spirit-empowered mercy and grace one receives through faith in the merit of the cross of Jesus Christ, a victory which is sustained through in a continuous dependence upon the living Holy Spirit that dwells within those who are redeemed*. Human effort against sin, whether personal or corporate, will always result in defeat; it is by the power of God alone that fallen humanity comes to salvation (justification), a salvation which is revealed and assured by living out a life that is solely centered on God (sanctification). Luther wrote of this breakthrough in his heart:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by

¹⁴ Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 158-160.

my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God. . . . At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words . . . “He who through faith is righteous shall live”. . . . Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.¹⁵

The Reformation to the Great Awakening

The Reformation brought to the forefront the need for fallen humanity, both individually and corporately, to consider the true depravity of their sinful condition in light of the glorious nature of God’s holiness and majesty. “The Protestant Reformers were fully aware of this factor. It was Luther’s perception of the depth of his own sin *coram deo* (measured by the holiness of God, not by common human estimation) that opened his heart to the need for justification by faith. . . . The Puritans and Pietists and the leaders of the First Awakening carried over these insights into God’s holiness and human depravity and articulated them in vigorous preaching.”¹⁶ This biblical view of God and man would once again cause conflict within many hearts following the Reformation, during the periods of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. “From the Renaissance came the creation of what many have called ‘humanism.’ As the name implies, much of this was simply a celebration of the humanities and humanity itself.”¹⁷ Initially this humanism did not reject the view of God and man established during the Reformation; early humanism sought a return to things classical, just as the Reformation had re-established the classical theological view of God and man rooted in the teachings

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 34 (St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress, 1955-76), 336-337.

¹⁶ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 83.

¹⁷ White, *Serious Times*, 22.

of Augustine. God-centeredness was once again back in fashion. “Thus the cry of *ad fontes* – ‘back to the sources’ – provided men and women with the impetus to reach back into the past, beyond any corruption that might have developed in and through the medieval church, to the golden age of the apostolic era.”¹⁸ But as always, the flesh rose up within the fallen heart of sinful humanity and the battle once again came to the front, as over time humanism centered on God became humanism centered on man, and the two natures once again became both personally and publicly adversarial. The call to return to the classics also brought back the classical belief by Plato that “man is the measure of all things” - which eventually began to bring into question many beliefs, truths, values and perspectives commonly held in the world. “An increasing number of European intellectuals used new ideas about the natural world, society and the nature of things to attack the established churches, to question traditional views of divine revelation and even (in an unprecedented step) to doubt the existence of God.”¹⁹

About a hundred years after the Reformation, leading thinkers and writers in Western Europe used this questioning about divine revelation and God’s existence to exalt human reason as the solution to all of mankind’s problems. This rationalistic movement came to be known as the Enlightenment. While the Enlightenment did plant seeds that would eventually yield great movements of God’s Spirit through German Pietism, the ministries of John Wesley and George Whitefield, and the First Great Awakening – the dominant spirit of the age was centered on man, not on God. Self-centered philosophies and “autonomous human reason reigned supreme” as “the

¹⁸ White, *Serious Times*, 24.

¹⁹ Noll, *Turning Points*, 251.

Enlightenment was a rebellion against one source of authority – the church and its appeal to God and his revelation – and the enthronement of another authority, human reason.”²⁰

Before the Enlightenment the unquestioned voice of authority was God; theology reigned supreme over science and philosophy. But by the end of the seventeenth century, as humanism evolved through the reason of fallen humanity, the God-centered worldview held throughout all of history had faded. And it continued to fade, as by the eighteenth century many who believed that God had created the universe no longer believed in a sovereign God who was personally and actively involved in all of life; by the nineteenth century those same people became openly hostile to a belief in God altogether.²¹

But as history has demonstrated, the battle against God-centeredness in the human heart is often the means by which God powerfully moves in the hearts of His people. As a result of the Reformation’s emphasis on individualistic faith and the focus on humanistic liberty espoused during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, Christians began to exercise their new freedoms. In England, a number of dissenting groups emerged against the institutional church. The first group was the Puritans, who became known for their keen pursuit of God-centeredness. As their movement grew, the Spirit of God moved and transformed a great many hearts and lives through pockets of revival. At the same time a similar movement developed in continental Europe called Pietism, which emphasized the God-centered life through individual devotion to God, a conversion experience, serious Bible study, and hymn singing. In the course of time God providentially used both of these movements to stir a mighty spiritual awakening in the hearts of many in Europe and

²⁰ White, *Serious Times*, 25-26.

²¹ White, *Serious Times*, 47.

in Great Britain. The revival in the British Isles, led by John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield, would ultimately make its way into the colonies of America.

The First Great Awakening

The First Great Awakening, generally recognized as being from 1726-70, overtly revealed the battle of the fallen nature of the flesh and the Spirit of God within the singular human heart and the corporate heart of the church. A look at its history shows that in the midst of this great movement of God's Spirit, there was also great opposition – both from those within the church and from those outside the faith. In the early years of the revival, Dutch Reformed pastor Theodore Frelinghuysen experienced this conflict of natures in New Jersey. He preached constantly and consistently on the necessity of conversion to those in his congregation, which resulted in both salvation/spiritual renewal in some and aggressive resistance in others. “Despite opposition, revival flourished.”²²

Jonathan Edwards

The First Great Awakening had its roots in New England and was centered on the ministry of Congregationalist pastor Jonathan Edwards and the subsequent itinerant visits by George Whitefield from England. Revivals had been somewhat commonplace on a smaller scale in the churches of New England in the first few generations of Christianity on this continent. Edwards recorded that the church in Northampton, Massachusetts where he served as pastor had experienced five other awakenings of the Spirit of God before the Great Awakening swept through so many churches with great force and

²² McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 207.

awesome effect.²³ Revival erupted when Edwards preached a series of messages on justification by faith. Many in his congregation responded supernaturally as they were moved deeply to center their hearts on God. Edwards later wrote:

And then it was, in the latter part of December, that the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in, and wonderfully to work amongst us. There were, very suddenly, one after another, and some of them wrought upon in a very remarkable manner. . . . Those that were wont to be the vainest and loosest, and those that had been the most disposed to think and speak of slightly of vital and experimental religion, were now generally subject to great awakenings. And the work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner and increased more and more; souls did, as it were, come by flocks to Jesus Christ.²⁴

More than three hundred surrendered to Christ within six months (in a town of only 1200 people) and by the spring of 1735 the church was filled to capacity each week. Often during the services the entire congregation was moved to tears, some by their joy in God and others over the conviction of their sin. As God moved in their hearts, the people openly and passionately centered their lives on God and His purposes. “Edwards wrote that the entire town was transformed into an unusual God-consciousness.”²⁵ As the restoration of God’s image and God’s purpose is the yearning of every human heart, the fire of this God-centeredness spread throughout the Connecticut River valley.²⁶

This work of God, as it was carried on and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town, so that in the spring and summer following, anno 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God. It never was so full of love nor so full of joy, and yet so full of distress, as it was then. . . . The goings of God were then seen in His sanctuary, God’s day was a delight and His tabernacles were amiable. Our public assemblies were then beautiful; the congregation was alive in God’s service, everyone earnestly intent on the public worship, every hearer eager to drink the words of the minister as they came from his mouth. The assembly in general were, from time to time, in tears while the word

²³ Armstrong, *True Revival*, 101.

²⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *Select Works of Jonathan Edwards: A Narrative of Surprising Conversions* (Edinburgh, England; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965) 12-13.

²⁵ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 213.

²⁶ Armstrong, *True Revival*, 103.

was preached, some weeping with sorry and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for their neighbors.²⁷

Edwards wrote that as the Holy Spirit moved within the hearts of God's people in the church at Northampton, they began to understand the centrality of God and the purpose of His glory for their lives, which caused them also to see how deeply the infection of sin had a grip on their lives. This is the ongoing battle between the flesh of sinful man and the Spirit of God within the heart of fallen humanity. Lovelace writes: "They suddenly became aware that their problem was not isolated acts of conscious disobedience to God, but a deep aversion to God at the root of their personalities, an aversion which left them in unconscious bondage to unbelief, selfishness, jealousy and other underlying complexes of sin."²⁸ Many were in agony over this, Edwards wrote, until they realized, like Augustine and Luther, that the only victory they could gain over their fallen depravity was that of surrendering their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ and allowing the power of God to defeat their sinful nature. "The new lives which they began to live issued out of hearts thoroughly broken because of sin."²⁹

But as in all great movements of God's spirit in the hearts of His people, there was also opposition within both the separate and collective hearts of fallen humanity. "Opposition will come – not only from the world, but also from those within the church who have worldly hearts."³⁰ Edwards experienced this both from within and from outside the church. Outside the church Edwards faced opposition from Charles Chauncy, the well-known pastor of First Congregational Church in Boston, who wrote his well-known attack against revivals such as those at Northampton entitled *Seasonable Thoughts*

²⁷ Edwards, *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions*, 14.

²⁸ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 38.

²⁹ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 39.

³⁰ Armstrong, *True Revival*, 170.

on the State of Religion in New England in 1743. As a child of the Enlightenment Chauncy's theology had a humanistic, rationalist basis and, according to Keith Hardman, he "did not believe that reason opposed revelation, but rather that the Holy Spirit dealt with humans as reasonable creatures able to perceive and be persuaded of the truth by reason-confirmed revelation. He felt that the emotions must be kept under rational control or they would run headlong into enthusiasm."³¹ Thus he rejected the notion that the great affections and emotions in response to the movement of God's Spirit could be as strong as they were at Northampton, and therefore could not have been of God. Resistance within the heart also came from within the church. "Opposition will come . . . from those within the church who have worldly hearts. In the past, some of the most articulate anti-revival forces have come from within the church."³² Over time, as the effects of the revival diminished, Edwards began to face increasing opposition within his congregation to the God-centeredness that had prevailed. This opposition came to the front when in 1748 he refused to admit an applicant without a public profession of faith. Two stormy years later, Edwards was dismissed from his position as pastor by a council of the church. Lovelace writes that while Edwards was amazed at the depth and the extent and manner with which the Spirit of God worked in fallen hearts during the awakening, he clearly was not at all surprised by the opposition to it. Lovelace writes:

As the Great Awakening unfolded in America after Whitefield's arrival in 1739, Edwards became aware that the revival involved a spiritual struggle in which every advance of renewal would involve severe conflict with fallen human nature and the powers of darkness. Since the work of revival involves the displacement of the world, the flesh and the devil, periods of renewal are times of great spiritual agitation in which troop movements on both sides are dimly visible in the background. As the sun shining on a swamp produces mist, the rising of the

³¹ Keith Hardman, *Seasons of Refreshing: Evangelism and Revivals in America* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), 73.

³² Armstorng, *True Revival*, 170.

countenance of God among his people may result initially in disorders and confusion.³³

George Whitefield

While Jonathan Edwards may have been the theologian, philosopher and scholar of the Great Awakening, George Whitefield was the catalyst who stoked the fires that burned in the hearts of God's people, thereby fueling the revival of God-centered faith. Whitefield burned with a passion for God that grew out of his personal experience in the battle of the two natures within his own heart. Struggling with his sinful nature early in life Whitefield was led to read a small, obscure book, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, written by a long-forgotten Scottish pastor named Henry Scougal, which drove him to passionately pursue a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. After exhaustive efforts in his own flesh to do so, he found that nothing he could do, or pray, or think seemed to help. In desperation Whitefield threw himself on his bed and cried out, "I thirst!"³⁴ It was then, as with Augustine and Luther, that he surrendered to the sovereignty of God's spirit over his fallen sinful nature. On that night Whitefield became aware that he was happier than he had been for quite some time, and he knew that was because he had fully and without reserve, without struggle or claim, surrendered his heart and life into the hands of God. "The sheer simplicity, almost the absurdity, of being saved by such a prayer made George Whitefield laugh. At that laugh, the flood gates burst. "Joy – joy unspeakable – joy that's full of, big with glory!"³⁵

³³ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 41.

³⁴ Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *Light and the Glory* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 177). 243.

³⁵ John Pollock, *George Whitefield and the Great Awakening* (New York, New York: Doubleday, 1972), 18-19.

Whitefield was ordained at the age of twenty-two and soon became more popular than any preacher before or since his time. Whether on weekdays or Sunday, wherever Whitefield preached, the churches were crowded, as he eloquently presented the pure gospel in the rare gifting of his voice and manner. Upon the encouragement of his close friend John Wesley, Whitefield visited the colony of Georgia in North America, not only to preach but also to assist in the care of an orphan house which had been set up near Savannah. When he returned to England, he was disappointed at the changes that had occurred in his absence. The majority of the clergy there were opposed to his God-centered theology and preaching methods. This compelled Whitefield to seek ministry outside of the church, where he preached to thousands through a series of open-air meetings. For the most part the thousands who flocked to hear him preach received him favorably. But due to the sinful nature that lives within the hearts of fallen humanity, men did oppose him. The resistance he experienced knew no particular social class. He met resistance when he preached to the rough coal miners in the open fields. Once, while preaching in the Moorfields, he wrote: "I was honoured with having a few stones, dirt, rotten eggs, and pieces of dead cat thrown at me."³⁶ Whitefield's heart for God also clashed with those of refined nobility in England; when he preached to them "the results were mixed, for although many lords and ladies truly repented and received Christ, at least as many more were outraged at the suggestion that they were sinners, and that they might have even a greater need of Christ than the common people."³⁷ Increasingly

³⁶ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 193.

³⁷ Marshall and Manuel, *Light and the Glory* 245.

Whitefield's God-centered preaching met with opposition, which continued throughout the rest of his ministry.³⁸ He wrote of this often in his journals:

Met with little opposition today; but I should have wondered indeed, if such an effectual door had been opened for preaching Christ, and there had been no adversaries. Nothing has done more harm to the Christian Church than thinking the examples recorded in Holy Scriptures, were written only to be read and not imitated by us.³⁹

The place was very much thronged, many were very noisy, and others did us the honour of throwing up stones at the windows. But I spoke so much louder, being convinced some good must come out from a place where opposition is. I should doubt whether I was a true minister of Christ, was I not opposed. And I find it does me much good; for it drives me nearer to my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, with Whom I long dwell.⁴⁰

The congregation consisted of thousands . . . whilst I was preaching, I heard many people behind me, hollering, and making noise, and supposed they were set on by somebody on purpose to disturb me.⁴¹

It was in this way Whitefield went about the Lord's business: preaching wherever he would be heard, urging all to repent and surrender their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Between 1736 and 1770 Whitefield preached more than 18,000 sermons to literally millions of people. He crossed the Atlantic seven times for the cause of Christ, and served faithfully, leading to the restoration of thousands of hearts and lives back to their divinely created purpose in God, until he died suddenly at Newbury Port on Sunday, September 29th, 1770, at the age of fifty-six from a spasmodic fit of asthma.

What stands out most clearly about George Whitefield is his absolute dedication to the sovereign God whom he deeply loved. He was committed, surrendered, and sold-out to God with his whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, and his life displayed the highest

³⁸ Hardman, *Seasons of Refreshing*, 83.

³⁹ George Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals* (Edinburgh, England; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 114.

⁴⁰ Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*, 209.

⁴¹ Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*, 239.

example personal piety, purity and holiness. His life, in every area, was centered on God, making Whitefield intensely aware of both the depth of his fallen sinful depravity and the sovereign holiness of his most glorious God. During those times, he wrote: “I would be so overpowered with a sense of God’s infinite majesty, that I would be constrained to throw myself on the ground and offer my soul as a blank in His hands, to write on it what He pleased.”⁴² Whitefield was quite aware of the battle between the flesh and the spirit within the heart of fallen humanity. He saw it not only in those who opposed his preaching, but he was also humbly aware of the battle within his own heart: “If it were not for the corruptions of my own heart, which were continually stirring, what have I to disturb my peace?”⁴³ But while Whitefield knew of the battle within the heart, he also knew of the victory that could come within the heart when one re-centers their life on God for the purpose of His glory. Whitefield had experienced – and continued to experience – the power of the spirit over the flesh in his own heart; and he observed the victory of that power firsthand in the hearts of many in the crowds who gathered to hear him share his heart for God through preaching.

A great commotion . . . in the hearts of God’s people. Most were drowned with tears. The Word was sharper than a two-edged sword. The bitter cries and groans were enough to pierce the hardest heart. Some of the people were pale as death; others were wringing their hands; others lying on the ground; others sinking in the arms of friends; and most lifting up their eyes to Heaven and crying to God for mercy.⁴⁴

I believe there were nearly twelve thousand. I had not spoken long before I perceived numbers melting. As I proceeded, the influence increased, till, at last, thousands cried out, so that they almost drowned my voice. Never did I see a more glorious sight. Oh what tears were shed and poured forth after the Lord Jesus.⁴⁵

⁴² Whitefield, *George Whitefield’s Journals*, 83.

⁴³ Whitefield, *George Whitefield’s Journals*, 147.

⁴⁴ Whitefield, *George Whitefield’s Journals*, 425.

⁴⁵ Whitefield, *George Whitefield’s Journals*, 425.

I have not been where God has made His power more to be known. Many who were quite blind, have received their sight; many who were ashamed to own Christ openly, have waxen bold; and many who were saints have had their hearts filled with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.⁴⁶

As Whitefield and Edwards preached glorious victory over the sinful nature that lives within the heart of fallen humanity by the power of the Spirit of the living God, through heart-repentance and the receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – “a sense of awe swept the colonies as they were overwhelmed by torrents of awakening.”⁴⁷ The country was spiritually awakened to a God-centered faith from north to south and east to west. Overwhelming numbers of people professed to transformed hearts and changed lives. Individual hearts were united as one and literally thousands of people were added to churches all across the country. “Historians estimate that 25,000 to 50,000 persons were added to the churches in New England alone, amounting to 7 to 14 percent of the population. New churches were started in record numbers, and colleges like Dartmouth and Princeton were started to train missionaries and ministers to carry the gospel to the lost world.”⁴⁸ As God's people joyfully centered their hearts and lives on God and His purpose, God was glorified as His people once again found their greatest satisfaction in Him – the restoration of His divinely created image in their hearts. In spite of the great opposition that rises up during times of spiritual revival within the hearts of fallen humanity, the purposes of our most sovereign God continue to come to pass. Romans 8:28 tells us “that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” In spite of the battle between the two natures,

⁴⁶ Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*, 137.

⁴⁷ McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 203.

⁴⁸ Henry Blackaby, *Fresh Encounter: Experiencing God Through Prayer, Humility, and a Heartfelt Desire to Know Him* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 8.

God's divine purpose will come to pass when we center our purposes – and our lives and our hearts - on God and God alone. This is good news for us within church, the body of Christ, in the times we live in today.

CHAPTER 8

THE BATTLE FOR THE HEART WITHIN THE CHURCH

"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."
Matthew 15:8

Some years ago as I found myself answering question after question from a sanctuary full of people who were considering calling me to serve as the senior pastor at their church, a woman in her senior years suddenly shouted out: "What about me pastor? What do you have for me?" I somewhat remember responding by telling her that there was always a place for those who are mature in years to serve and lead within the body of Christ; in fact I saw a clear mandate in the Bible that senior adults should do so. She seemed satisfied with my answer, and as I did accept a call to pastor the church, I was encouraged as I saw her willingly and joyfully step forward and serve the body of Christ during the first few years I was there. But like a moth drawn to a flame, over time she began to show signs of reluctance and resistance to being fully taken in by the heat and light of the fullness of the sovereignty and supremacy of God. Once I began to lead and preach and teach on the deeper calling of God in Scripture – that God created us in His image for the purpose of glorifying Him, and that as we joyfully do so, God will then become the preeminent and supreme center of our hearts, lives, and purposes - she became dissatisfied and disgruntled, and in due course left the church. We read in John 6 that Jesus experienced that same resistance in calling people to a deeper relationship with God. The crowds had been following Jesus because he had been miraculously healing the sick and providing abundant food out of nearly nothing. Then our Lord Jesus called them to something deeper beyond their self-centered yearnings of their fallen flesh:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. . . . I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” (John 6:26-27, 35, 53)

Scripture tells us that after Jesus spoke these words, like a moth backing away from the flame, much of the crowd left: "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him" (John 6:66). Yet those who stayed sought to be consumed by the flame as they sought to place God at the center of their hearts and lives, declaring Jesus Christ to be the supreme and preeminent God of all: "You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69).

In my past and present experience in ministry as an evangelist and a pastor, in the church, in prisons, and on the mission field, I have encountered - and continue to encounter - this back-and-forth battle between the two natures within the heart. The initial response to presenting the deeper call of the heart to God-centeredness is almost always one of great interest; but at some point along the way a division always seems to occur. Some surrender to the spirit and passionately embrace the restoration of their created purpose, while others resist and respond either passively or aggressively in rejecting it. Through a great number of conversations and connections in a variety of ministry settings, I have found this also to be the consistent experience for many of my ministry colleagues in various positions. What God's Word revealed to us and what we have observed throughout history is still true today: created humanity continues to be both drawn and resistant to God, just as a moth is both drawn and resistant to a flame.

The Battle for the Heart within the Contemporary Church

We see that while the church of Jesus Christ today is hungering for a deeper and closer relationship with God, the people of God still continue to fall victim to the spiritual and moral decline of the modern secular world. The reason for this failure is that the hearts and lives of God's people are no longer centered on God and His purposes for them; rather in their hunger for spirituality, they are seeking personal fulfillment and spiritual satisfaction by the ways and means, and for the purposes of the world. This is the battle that being fought within the church for the hearts of God's people today. As the focus has deviously shifted from God-centeredness to self-centeredness within the Body of Christ "those who have unintentionally become the bitterest opponents of renewal in the church have often been professing Christians."¹ Due to the battle between the flesh and the spirit within every human heart, a return to God-centeredness is a paradigm shift that will cause division within the body of Christ as "every believer is sufficiently influenced by his own fallenness and remaining corruption to do all manner of harm, even in the name of Christ."² Underneath all of the glare and glitter of mega-church ministry and church growth methodology, the contemporary church still struggles with a deep sense of emptiness; a hunger for something more than the selfish, materialistic world can provide – a desire for something more, something greater, something breathtaking and beyond themselves. In this restless searching, countless waves of people are seeking personal significance by turning to the spiritual world, the lost image of God which they sense instinctively. At the deepest root of their hearts fallen humans know that life is spiritual, and they long to touch and be touched by that which is

¹ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 258.

² John Armstrong, *True Revival* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2001), 171.

ultimate, supernatural and transcendent.³ “But many are unable to go further than *the search* for a spiritual experience”⁴ because of the battle within the heart; too many are choosing self over God, and passively backing away from the flame of God. David Bryant calls this a *crisis of supremacy*. He writes: “For many believers it feels like an aching absence of the dynamic relationship with the Lord Jesus God promised – like a forfeiture of the holy, happy hope in Him we thought we were meant to have.”⁵ We have come to this point, Bryant explains, as a result of buying into Christian concepts such as Rick Warren’s “the purpose driven church” and “the purpose driven life” rather than the biblical reality of God-centeredness through Jesus Christ:

How many of us have discovered, first of all, what it means to be *Person-driven* in our churches and lives? How many of us are drawn into the prior issue, a passion for the person of the supreme, sovereign and all-sufficient Son of God – for whom the purpose for our churches and our lives exists to begin with?⁶

Tragically, for multitudes of Christians there appears to be little of a compelling, *Person-driven* core to their sense of God’s purpose. Motivation based on Christ for ALL that He is, remains marginal. Relatively few of us are propelled with a hope and passion worthy of God’s Firstborn and ignited by Scriptures teachings on His Lordship in everything. Instead, far too often we find ourselves stumbling over His supremacy.⁷

It is not my intent here to attack Rick Warren or to take a position contrary to his writings, which have literally changed many thousands of lives. Clearly Warren has taken great pains to keep his “purpose-driven” model from becoming too self-centered by proclaiming that “the purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal

³ Bruce DeMarest, *Satisfy Your Soul; Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1999), 45.

⁴ James Emery White, *Serious Times: Making Your Life Matter in an Urgent Day* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 63.

⁵ David Bryant, *Christ Is All: A Joyful Manifesto on the Supremacy of God’s Son* (New Providence, New Jersey: New Providence Publishers, 2004), 4.

⁶ Bryant, *Christ Is All*, 9.

⁷ Bryant, *Christ Is All*, 10.

fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness.”⁸ Yet while his books are much read and quite widely used, there are a significant number of credible critics who, like David Bryant, see Warren’s work as being somewhat contradictory to what has been traditionally accepted as orthodox, biblical truth. The question at hand seems to be whether the “purpose-driven” concept is a subtle, but significant departure from the historic understanding of the God-centered gospel of Jesus Christ, or simply a modern attempt to use contemporary thought-forms to connect people with the “*Person-driven*” reality of the gospel. Since Warren’s writings are so new within the history of Christian culture, we most likely will not know if the “purpose-driven” paradigm will leave a legacy of being God-centered or self-centered for some time, for as Jesus once said: “Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:20). As in all true revivals that are centered on God, the “*Person-driven*” reality of Jesus Christ will ultimately come to fruition in the end if Warren’s works are truly centered on God. As our Lord also said: “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

How has self-centeredness affected the church, the body of Christ, God’s chosen people today? The Word of God and history has shown us that if Jesus is not supreme, if God is not the center of all things, then we are led by default to a more “me-centered” approach to Christianity within the fleshly nature of our hearts. Those who led the Reformation – such as Luther, Zwingli and Calvin - were fully aware of this tendency of the fallen heart, as were the leaders of the Great Awakening. But succeeding generations gradually moved away from confronting the reality of sinful self-centeredness, and instead stressed the goodness of created humanity and the kindness of God. By the

⁸ Rich Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002), 17.

Second Awakening, God was no longer presented as the supreme and sovereign Creator Being over all things, but rather as a kindly, fatherly, comprehensible God, so much so that by late nineteenth century Moody's messages were centered principally around just the truth that "God is Love."⁹ We are still feeling that effect today as many are attracted to this God of love, but then reject the God of judgment, as it doesn't fit their image of the loving God that they have created in their own minds. This is the same reason the Jews rejected Jesus when he came because he did not match their image of God or the Messiah they had in mind. Their Messiah was defined by what they wanted the Messiah to be, not by what the scriptures said He would be. The truth is God is love, but He is also holy and just. He will forgive sin, but He will not tolerate it. One wonders how long our sovereign, loving God will faithfully forgive a people who honor Him with their lips, but whose hearts are far from being centered on who He truly is, and could be, in their lives. This is the battle that is truly being fought today in the hearts of those who claim to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

⁹ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 83.

CHAPTER 9

THE BATTLE FOR THE HEART WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN

For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit,
and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh,
for these are opposed to each other,
to keep you from doing the things you want to do.
Galatians 5:17

Before God called me into full time ministry, I worked for a number of years in the vocation of my training as a land surveyor. During that time I remember hearing of a land developer who was involved in a massive construction project – and who had an unusual but highly effective way of motivating his employees. For those who put in a lot of hours and did exceptional work, he would name streets after them in his new housing developments. And there were many who worked exceptionally hard as they sought to take him up on his offer. The passion to respond to self-centeredness is ingrained within our fallen hearts. As a pastor I was once asked to do a funeral for a high ranking law enforcement official who had died suddenly of a heart attack. He was well-known throughout the county and beyond where he had served. At the same time he was very much disliked by many due to having a reputation for being self-centered and arrogant – so much so that no other church would allow his funeral service to be done in their building. I finally agreed to lead the service, and with the sanctuary and fellowship hall packed beyond capacity with high ranking officials, family, friends, and enemies, I preached from Romans 8:1-4 where I spoke of the battle between the two natures within the heart of fallen humanity, and of the victory that comes in that battle by surrendering to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. A close friend of the deceased closed the service by singing the song, *“I Did It My Way.”* Sadly many who claim Christ as Lord and Savior

singing that same song in their own hearts and lives. “The tragedy of the world,” John Piper writes, “is that the echo is mistaken for the Original Shout. When our back is to the breathtaking beauty of God, we cast a shadow on the earth and fall in love with it. But it does not satisfy.”¹ This is our struggle: Love of self or love of God? Self-centeredness or God-centeredness? This is the battle within the human heart. “We easily wander down the path that leads away from God, squandering our inheritance on that which we hope will bring pleasure, even as over and over we find it brings no joy.”²

The True Depth of the Battle within the Heart

It is said that a horse, after it has been let out of a burning building will sometimes, by a strange obstinacy, break loose from its rescuer and dash back into the building again to perish in the flames. In the battle within the heart, the flesh will sometimes passionately rise up and aggressively fight against the Spirit, in order to protect and preserve the “self” of the flesh – most often to the detriment or destruction of the soul. The sinful nature of the flesh within our hearts has a much greater effect in our lives than we can imagine or are even willing to admit. Tozer states that “the sinner prides himself on his independence, completely overlooking the fact that he is the weak slave of the sins that rule his members.”³ The fallen nature within our hearts that resisted and rejected the authority of God in the Garden continues to battle against anything other than its own autonomy even after – and especially after – the spirit of God dwells within. The reality is, whenever we encounter something new, we automatically check it against the grid of

¹ John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah, 2001), 9.

² Mark McMinn, *Finding Our Way Home: Turning Back to What Matters Most* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 25.

³ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, 1993), 96.

our past experiences and personal beliefs. This is where the battle for the preservation of self rises up within the flesh of our hearts; our fallen sinful nature immediately resists and rejects what we do not understand, because it may pose a threat to the independence of self. The battle arises because the spirit of God within our heart is open to that which is new (“Behold, I am making all things new” - Revelation 21:5) and is born of a God who is beyond understanding (“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” - Isaiah 55:9). “It is a fact of human existence that, when confronted with the new, our natural tendency is to defend our old position from behind a wall of resistance, sometime even when our old position is draining the life out of us”⁴ - just like the rescued horse running back into a burning building, or like a moth that rejects the heat and light of the flame for the cold of the darkness.

What is significant is that not only is this self-centered blind spot of fallen human nature spoken of as a truth in God’s Word, but it is also a truth supported by many years of social science research. While it is common belief among many that as divinely created human beings our actions and behaviors flow out of our opinions and beliefs, decades of studies and research reveal the exact opposite. McMinn writes: “More often than not, we first observe our behaviors and then craft our opinions to be consistent with those behaviors. In other words, we justify what we have already done by changing our beliefs. . . . We shift our opinions to be consistent with our behaviors.”⁵ The reality of this is: if we do not open up our hearts to opinions and experiences and ideas beyond

⁴ Bruce DeMarest, *Satisfy Your Soul; Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1999), 56-57.

⁵ Mark McMinn, *Why Sin Matters: The Surprising Relationship Between Our Sin and God’s Grace* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 76.

ourselves, we run the risk of shaping God into our views and our ways. The result is that we then create God in our image and we never allow God to restore us back into His image, the image we were originally intended to be.⁶

Jean Paul Sartre once wrote that “Man is the being whose project is to be God.”⁷ In reality this is the struggle of Christianity in our day, particularly in our western culture which struggles with an unhealthy immersion into autonomous individualism. Too often the contemporary Christian spiritual journey has become one of a trek into narcissism, where God is waiting to fulfill our needs and wants. This is a battle which actually began during the Reformation, when the pursuit and practice of faith through the church was rejected and instead became a matter of personal responsibility. “The will of God was to be determined individually and then followed. But by the second half of the nineteenth century, this individualism morphed into the idea of having the right to do whatever you wanted provided it did not harm others.”⁸ Tozer once wrote: “Self is the opaque veil that hides the face of God from us.”⁹ The battle for the heart within those who have surrendered to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is really a battle against “the self.” Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him *deny himself* and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Jesus is not telling us we must deny ourselves in the sense of negating or annihilating ourselves, but rather we are “to abdicate our passions and get rid of those things that claim our lives with petty self-interest.”¹⁰ God would never ask or demand that we stop being who we are; He created us in His image for His glory! But

⁶ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 58.

⁷ Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York, New York: Citadel Press, 1957), 63.

⁸ James Emery White, *Serious Times: Making Your Life Matter in an Urgent Day* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 44.

⁹ Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 43.

¹⁰ Calvin Miller, *Into the Depths of God* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 2000), 107.

what Jesus is asking, demanding of us, is that we stop being self-centered, self-serving, self-absorbed. Calvin Miller writes: “He wants no self to cease, only to cease being selfish. He can best communicate this to us when we are silent and in ‘the center’ of our relationship with him. . . . It is at the center that we know who we are in and who is the source of our worth.”¹¹ God created us in His image for the purpose of glorifying Him by joyfully living out our divinely-created, God-centered lives. *When we put God at the center rather than the self, we find the true “self” that God originally created us to be.* Once we find our true “self” in God, we then find out our true purpose in life. In other words when we truly become *Person-driven* (God-centered), we will then become *purpose-driven* (to glorify God). “What God has for us to do is who we are . . . they are one and the same. . . . Our call puts a holy centeredness into our being.”¹² James Emery White says the same when he writes: “The primary sense of our calling is that it is not for self but for God’s glory.”¹³ This is the battle cry within the sinful fallen human heart: that the spirit of God would rise up and overcome the “fallen self” within. “Christ’s knock lands on doors shut tight by self-satisfaction. With urgency He invites us to open up to gaze on Him again for all that He is, to awaken to more of what He could be in us and through us, so that we might join Him back on His throne.”¹⁴

Hunger for God within the Heart of God’s People

The true satisfaction that the self within seeks is rooted in the truth that humans were initially designed with the beauty and glory of the image of God eternally imprinted

¹¹ Miller, *Into the Depths of God*, 108.

¹² Miller, *Into the Depths of God*, 136.

¹³ White, *Serious Times*, 120.

¹⁴ David Bryant, *Christ Is All: A Joyful Manifesto on the Supremacy of God’s Son* (New Providence, New Jersey: New Providence Publishers, 2004), 246.

within their hearts. But ever since creation was ruptured by sinful rebellion, we have been wandering through life searching for that beauty and glory that we only faintly recall. “Instinctively we know that we are made to enjoy something beautiful and good, yet we too easily and too often settle for something less.”¹⁵ The concept of our faith in Christ called redemption implies that we once possessed something of great joy and goodness, but have drifted far off from what we enjoyed, and now seek to go back and recover that which was lost. The yearning and ache of our hearts is for the true self that can only be found in God. McMinn writes that “in one way or another, our stories are about finding pathways toward home. Here is a homeward lilt in our step, an inclination of our hearts toward that which is familiar and safe. . . . Home calls to us, tugs at our emotions, pulls us back to places of familiarity.”¹⁶

Sometimes we see through the fog of our daily distractions and recognize how much we yearn for God, for our spiritual home, for that divine embrace of spiritual centeredness that tells us all will be well even when life seems difficult.

Longing for home is good, a winsome reflection of the way we are created. God is tugging at our hearts, inviting us back to the security of divine love. Intuitively, we know we are crafted by God for something beautiful, and we yearn for it, but this longing is simultaneously sad, reminding us that life in this world is not always as tidy as we wish.¹⁷

“God has put eternity in man’s mind and filled the human heart with longing. But we know not what we long for until we see the breathtaking God. This is the cause of universal restlessness.”¹⁸ The spiritual hunger that we experience within our hearts reflects the God-created natural human desire of those who have surrendered to Jesus Christ to be restored back to God and know the fulfillment and satisfaction that their

¹⁵ McMinn, *Finding Our Way Home*, 7.

¹⁶ McMinn, *Finding Our Way Home*, 17-18.

¹⁷ McMinn, *Finding Our Way Home*, 19.

¹⁸ Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight*, 8.

hearts, minds, souls, and strength were created for. But most often we stumble over the self of the flesh in our search for our true self in God, only to find that self is not God. Apart from God, the fallen self is both imprisoned and dead. “Only the living God can satisfy our deeper hungers because He is the One who planted the urge and longing for Himself in our hearts. . . . What He has planted is, in fact our longing to be healed of the wound that was rent in the spirit of the human race when we rebelled and pulled away from God. It is the longing to be whole again.”¹⁹

The battle within the fallen heart is for an encounter with the living God who created us to reflect and reveal His image in all that we say and do. “We were made to crave God with our whole being.”²⁰ Yet though we know to whom we belong in our spirits, we still continue to allow ourselves to be pulled away in a multitude of directions by our fallen, sinful natures. Becoming a Christian does not free one from sinning: Paul clearly states this in Romans 7. There are some who attempt to teach otherwise, but the whole counsel of God’s Word does not support this, and neither does the reality of the sin that still we still continue to experience within each one of our hearts and lives. The Bible and our lives reveal that in our heart-search for restoration we are not only in conflict against the sinful flesh within, but also against the fallen world around us and the devil himself. This is the battle of the heart.

It is true there is difficulty in entering into godliness. But this difficulty does not arise from the religion which begins in us, but only from the irreligion which is still there. If our senses were not opposed to penitence, and if our corruption were not opposed to the purity of God, there would be nothing in this painful to us. We suffer only in proportion as the vice which is natural to us resists supernatural grace. Our heart feels torn asunder between these opposed efforts. But it would be very unfair to impute this violence to God, who is drawing us on, instead of to the world, which is holding us back. It is as a child, which a mother tears from the arms of robbers, in

¹⁹ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 50.

²⁰ Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 49.

the pain it suffers, should love the loving and legitimate violence of her who procures its liberty, and detest only the impetuous and tyrannical violence of those who detain it unjustly. The most cruel war which God can make with men in this life is to leave them without that war which He came to bring. "I came to send war," He says, "and to teach them of this war. I came to bring fire and the sword."²¹

²¹ Blaise, Pascal, *Pensees*, Section VII: Morality & Doctrine, No. 498
[<http://www.godrules.net/library/pensees/pensees08.htm>], August 15, 2005.

CHAPTER 10

THE HEART CALL TO FIGHT FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.
I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”
Matthew 10:34

The emergence of Jesus onto the horizon of history signaled that the battle between the two natures within the heart of fallen humanity would be forced out into the open. His redemptive purpose to glorify God through his death, resurrection, and ascension would signal the beginning of the end of the spiritual war which began in the Garden and was still being fought in the hearts and souls of sinful mankind. “Jesus Christ is the great continental divide of history. Prior to his appearance, all humans devised countless ways to fill the God-shaped vacuum in their lives – animal and temple sacrifices, secret rituals, laws and regulations, impressive temples and more.”¹ That God-shaped vacuum would now be filled with the Holy Spirit in those who surrendered their hearts and lives to Christ. The self-centeredness embraced within the sinful hearts of fallen humanity would now be replaced by the God-centeredness of the Spirit of God, indwelling the hearts of those who would receive Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as Lord and Savior; “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The call to follow Christ is the call to God-centeredness. “Every one of us is called to a Word-centered life. Jesus Christ is among us as the Word of God living.”² Jesus saw the world as a great cosmic battle between good and evil, light and darkness, life and death; and he charged those who

¹ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (New York, New York: HarpersSanFrancisco, 1998), 275.

² Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 233.

would follow him to join him in the task of fighting and ultimately winning that battle. Jesus said those who would do so would be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16), which implies that when we fall victim to our sinful nature and the light of Christ is dimmed, then the darkness in the world increases.³ The power of the indwelling Holy Spirit within the hearts of God's people to overcome the flesh of our sinful nature is greatly weakened when "we allow the movement of God on the surface of our spirits to become lost amid the stones the world tosses thoughtlessly into our lives."⁴ The result is that "we become saved, but not seized; delivered, but not driven"⁵ in our pursuit to satisfy the hunger and thirst within our hearts for the God-centeredness we long for. It is then we become far too easily pleased and the intimate relationship with God we were created for in Christ becomes hidden by the darkness of our fallen nature, as things of the flesh, the world, and even evil take hold of our hearts. "The heart of our calling, however, is not to something but to *Someone*."⁶

Colossians 3:10 tells us who that *Someone* is: "Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." In being created in the image of a most sovereign, omnipotent God, *our calling is also the means of our empowering*. "Our redemption in Christ means that we can, even in this life, progressively grow into more and more likeness to God."⁷ God's Word does tell us that we can have victory in the battle within the heart between the flesh and the spirit, but because of the fallen nature of our character, we are dependent upon God's most merciful and graceful intervention. In

³ Henry Blackaby, *Fresh Encounter: Experiencing God Through Prayer, Humility, and a Heartfelt Desire to Know Him* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 5.

⁴ James Emery White, *Serious Times: Making Your Life Matter in an Urgent Day* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 12.

⁵ White, *Serious Times*, 12.

⁶ White, *Serious Times*, 117.

⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 445.

reflecting on his observations during the Great Awakening in the light of the principles of the Word of God, Edwards believed that “a sinful human nature . . . cannot desire to please God unless God by a miraculous infusion of his grace, changes the sinner’s charter.”⁸ While there does seem to be controversy among some concerning the roles of human free will and divine sovereign initiative in the processes of salvation (justification) and spiritual maturity (sanctification), I will accede here to the words of Augustine, the founder of biblical theology who “never rejected human response to and cooperation with the divine initiative. He confidently cut a path between unaided human initiative and total passivity, succinctly stated as follows: ‘without God we cannot; without us, he will not.’”⁹ Despite the truth-in-tension we feel between the depravity of humanity and the sovereign grace of God, there is mysterious reality to the biblical truth that a high and wide and deep degree of victory over the sinful flesh within the heart is possible when the fallen heart is sovereignly restored back to its original divinely created purpose of glorifying God, through the human response of joyfully embracing a God-centered life – which is the heart meaning of revival. While there is universal agreement that revival is entirely a sovereign work of God, almost all agree that God’s people are fully responsible to respond to the Spirit that God pours out into their hearts in order for spiritual awakenings to occur.

The Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility in the Battle for the Heart

As we look back at Paul’s heart struggle with the flesh and the spirit in Romans 7, it is clear he is aware that the victory over his fallen sin nature is not possible simply by an

⁸ Mark Noll, *A Christian History of the United States in Canada* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 96.

⁹ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 197.

act of his human free will: "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" (Romans 7:22-23). In the next two verses Paul proclaims the totality of his sinful depravity and his utter dependence on the sovereignty and supremacy of God through Jesus Christ to give him victory over his fallen sinful nature: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24-25). Continuing on through the next chapter the apostle once again affirms his dependency and God's sovereignty in the battle within the heart ("the Spirit helps us in our weakness" - Romans 8:26). He then proclaims the empowerment that gives victory within the human heart over the sinful nature of the flesh when our sovereign God intercedes through the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ for the purpose of restoring fallen humanity back into the image of God, accomplishing the purpose of His glory for which we were created:

And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:27-30)

"Being made in His image we have within us the capacity to know Him. In our sins we lack only the power."¹⁰ Once God providentially intervenes by the power of His Holy Spirit, we have the responsibility to respond. "The impulse to pursue God originates with God, but the outworking of that impulse is our following hard after Him."¹¹ Jesus clearly stated what our heart response is to be towards His sovereign involvement in the Greatest

¹⁰ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania; Christian Publications, 1993), 14.

¹¹ Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 11.

Commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). It is God's greatest desire that His people love Him with their total being. In other words, our response to God's sovereign intervention in our hearts (in our justification and our sanctification) should be to love God with such a depth and degree that we joyfully would put Him at the center of our hearts and lives – which would then glorify Him. God-centeredness is the fruit of our love and joy in God. "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" (1 Peter 1:8). In these words we read that: "Man's primary purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."¹² The fallen sinful nature within our hearts cannot overcome or defeat the supernatural power of a Spirit-led, God-centered heart that is passionately overflowing with joy and love for God. The glory of God trumps over the sin of the flesh every time. Edwards writes: "It is evident by the Scripture that true divine discoveries, or ideas of God's glory, when given a great degree, have a tendency, by affecting the mind, to overbear the body."¹³

Both the hummingbird and the vulture fly over our nation's deserts. All vultures see is rotting meat because as scavengers, that is what they were created to feed on. They thrive on that diet because the purpose of the vulture is to feed on the flesh of death. But hummingbirds steer clear and ignore the smelly flesh of dead animals. Instead they look for the colorful blossoms of wild flowers and desert plants for the sweet nectar they provide. The purpose of the hummingbird is to spread beauty by sight and song, and to

¹² Douglas Kelly and Philip Rollinson, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism in Modern English* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), 5.

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*. (Edinburgh, England; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 60.

bring life to the desert by spreading pollen. The vultures live on what was: they live on the past, they fill themselves with what is dead and gone. But hummingbirds live on what is today and what will be: they seek the sweetness of beauty, and fill themselves with freshness and newness of life. Both birds seek and feed on what they were created for. 2 Corinthians 2:16 tells us: “to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?” In the midst of the spiritual battle between the two natures within our hearts, we must ask the question: What were we created for? The old nature, or the new nature? The flesh of death, or the newness of life? God’s Word calls us to a God-centered response:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days. (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. (Romans 8:6)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (Galatians 5:16-17)

For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:8)

Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Put off the old self with its practices and . . . put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. (Colossians 3:9-10)

CHAPTER 11

THE GLORY OF VICTORY IN THE BATTLE FOR THE HEART

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
2 Corinthians 5:17

A.W. Tozer once wrote that “the life of man upon the earth is a life away from the Presence, wrenched loose from the ‘blissful center’ which is our right and proper dwelling place . . . the loss of which is the cause of our unceasing restlessness. The whole work of God in redemption is to undo the tragic effects of that foul revolt, and to bring us back again into right and eternal relationship with Himself.”¹ Because of the inherent sinful nature within fallen humanity, victory in the battle for the heart is not only hard but also often elusive. “Man’s nature is weak: flesh and blood are represented in Scripture as exceedingly weak; and particularly with respect to unfitness for great spiritual and heavenly operations and exercises.”² As a result of the fall, the battle between the power of God and the weakness of man’s sin nature rages on within the human heart; “we were created for Eden, but we live east of Eden.”³ For that very reason – because of the sinful fallen nature that continues to fight against the Spirit of God within the heart of humanity – spiritual revival is essential within each individual heart among God’s people, and within the community of faith, the body of Christ.

¹ A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania; Christian Publications, 1993), 33.

² Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*. (Edinburgh, England; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 60.

³ Mark McMinn, *Finding Our Way Home: Turning Back to What Matters Most* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 24.

The Need to Pursue Continuous Victory in the Battle for the Heart

Jesus gave us a picture of the continuous need to pursue victory over the sinful nature within the human heart when he shared the parable of the sower and the soils (Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). After Jesus told the parable he then explained that our hearts must be prepared to receive God and His truth, or we will fail in our faith. The sower (God) casts His seed (His truth) into the soil (the hearts of fallen humanity) seeking a harvest (spiritual maturity). When properly cultivated, the seed of God's truth can and will produce the abundant fruit of righteousness. Yet Jesus tells us there are forces that fight against the seed bearing fruit: the devil snatches the seed from hard hearts; the flesh produces a temporary response in shallow hearts, and the pleasures of the world smother growth in crowded hearts. The good ground represents those hearts that were prepared to receive the seed (of God's truth) and produced varying degrees of fruit (spiritual maturity). In speaking of those who did not produce fruit, Jesus said, "*For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them*" (Matthew 13:15); but for those who produced fruit he said, "As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, *hold it fast in an honest and good heart*, and bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

"God made each of us a certain way, and when we run that course, we feel pleasure – God's and ours."⁴ In being created in the image of our Creator, the pursuit of God is ingrained within our spiritual DNA, yet "the human quest for meaning easily devolves

⁴ James Emery White, *Serious Times: Making Your Life Matter in an Urgent Day* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 120.

into selfish pursuit of pleasure, and because our human calculus for minimizing pain and maximizing pleasure is badly skewed, we end up finding varieties of pleasures that evaporate long before they fulfill any of our deepest needs.”⁵ The reality of this truth is largely ignored or rejected within the community of faith today, as we are now living out the fallen effects of the individualism of the Reformation, the radical humanism of the Renaissance, and the humanistic reasoning of the Enlightenment. God’s Word tells us that “salvation is the restoration of a right relation between man and his Creator, a bringing back to normal the Creator-creature relation.”⁶

The Call to Victory in the Battle for the Heart

One of the major barriers we face today in knowing true victory in the battle for the heart is that the salvation/restoration relationship spoken of in the Scriptures has been redefined in our day, as salvation itself is now most often defined and understood as an *event*. Because of the sinful nature that continues to dwell within the fallen human heart, the battle for the right God-centered relationship between man and his Creator – that which we call salvation – is *not only* an event, but also *a continuing process*. Jesus himself said: “The one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13). Lovelace writes that “the entrance and growth of new spiritual life involves the shattering of our sphere of darkness by repentant faith in redemptive truth. If the fall occurred through the embracing of lies, the recovery process of salvation must center on faith in truth, reversing this condition.”⁷ Our greatest enemy in gaining the glory of victory in the battle

⁵ McMinn, *Finding Our Way Home*, 7.

⁶ Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, 92.

⁷ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 90.

of the heart is most often in how our own sinful nature has self-righteously guided us into *a shallow understanding of the concept of salvation*. Many today reject the biblical truth regarding *the utter and total depravity of our own sin*, which thereby minimizes the truth *of the absolute supremacy, preeminence, and sovereignty of God*. “The revivals of Billy Sunday were real and powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit according to living witnesses who worked in them, but they produced Christians who were shallow, moralistic and culture bound. For the purity of a revival is intimately related to its theological substance. A deep work cannot be done without the sharp instruments of truth. Unless revival involves and issues in theological reformation, its energy will be contained and its fruits will not last.”⁸

Salvation does not preclude our inclination towards sinfulness, and Scripture warns us against ignoring or rejecting the reality of our need to constantly and continually seek victory over our fallen human nature:

Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. (Jeremiah 17:5)

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-13).

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

No one living is righteous before you. (Psalm 143:2)

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. (1 Corinthians 3:18)

For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Galatians 6:3)

⁸ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 261.

“A sinless man would love God with all of his heart, and soul, and mind, and his neighbor as himself, constantly and with full vigor. The most advanced saint on earth has neither the faith nor the Spirit-empowered love to do this, and therefore a continual cleansing of our experience through the blood of Christ is necessary for us to be righteous in the sight of God, and this cleansing involves the awareness and admission of our falling short.”⁹ In the midst of the battle within our hearts, we must not lose heart but recognize that – *the very reason the battle is at hand is because God is calling us back to himself*. God’s answer to the struggle, the battle within our hearts between our two natures, is to turn away from the lost wandering of the seeking for “self” and answer the call of God to come back home to Him. Coming back home to God is the restoration of God’s glory in a people of God who have become once again centered on God and on His purpose for their lives. This is the constant and continuous call of God to His people: *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* – “a reformed church always reforming.” The Puritans and Pietists found this truth in a principle that Augustine himself taught: “the pre-condition of perpetual reformation is the spiritual revitalization of the church.”¹⁰ Because of the opposition we face within our own sinful hearts, and from the world and the devil, we are in need of continuous spiritual restoration back to God. The struggle from both inside and outside of our hearts reveals an infinite spiritual abyss that power, possessions, position and prosperity can’t fill. That void can only be filled with the image of God we were created for, and when we put God at the center of our hearts and lives – the God-shaped vacuum within our souls is then joyfully filled with the fullness of the

⁹ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 91.

¹⁰ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 13.

glory of God. "For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart" (Ecclesiastes 5:20).

One summer my wife Nancy and I, and our youngest son, spent a couple of weeks at a cabin in the Colorado Mountains not far from Pikes Peak. The people who owned the cabin lived nearby, and they had a dog, a border collie, whose name was Blue. During the first few days of our stay, Blue stayed clear of us; in fact, she growled when we got too close to her. But once she learned that we loved dogs, Blue began to soften up and follow us around with a stick in her mouth, constantly placing it on the ground before our feet with the hope that we would pick it up and throw it, so she could fetch it and bring it back. As the days went on, Blue's love for us grew. She would join me every day for my morning walks through the mountains and cuddle up in our laps when we'd sit on the porch. Her affection for us grew so deep that she would actually lay right outside our door all night waiting for us to come out. Blue was always watching and waiting to see where we were and what we were doing; whatever we did and wherever we went, she joyfully would follow along; during the rest of our time at the cabin Blue's life seemed to always revolve around us. It struck me one day that that's the kind of heart God desires from us. That's the kind of devotion and passion God created us for. That is what God-centeredness looks like. That's the God-shaped vacuum – "the infinite abyss" – the ache and yearning that we so often battle with in our hearts. Old Blue was more than sad when we left; we experience that same sadness when God is not at the center of our lives. Though we were created in God's image and Blue is not, I think we can learn something from Blue. In Galatians 5:24 the apostle Paul tells us that "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." The apostle Peter later writes

that we are “to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:2). The call of the human heart, created in the image of God, is to be passionately God-centered; as in the words of Augustine: “You made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace till they rest in you.”¹¹

Richard Wurmbrand once said: “When God intervenes in the life of a man, the man begins to love God’s shadow.”¹² While our fallen nature within will draw us to fall in love with our own shadow, the truth is that God is the only one who can truly satisfy the greatest longings of our hearts. Because we were created for God – in His image and for His glory – everything begins and ends with Him. If we honestly thought about our lives, we all would have to admit that we seldom start with God. We usually start with a personal desire or a demand made upon us, instead of looking first to the God who is able to guide us and lead us beyond ourselves or others. We often get so wrapped up in problems or people or personal feelings that confront or entangle us that we can’t get our hearts or our minds back onto God. When Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest, he responded by telling us to start by loving God. Jesus answered the question of what is the most important thing in all of life by pointing to the true purpose in all of life: God created us for the purpose of glorifying Him by loving Him.

The Key to Victory in the Battle for the Heart: Surrender to God

The Bible tells us that we were created for the purpose of a love relationship with God, a love relationship that is to be so full of God’s love for us and our love for God, that it reflects the image of God’s glory. That love relationship began at the time of

¹¹ Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Translation and introduction by John K. Ryan (New York, New York: Image/Doubleday, 1960) 43.

¹² Richard Wurmbrand, *Alone with God* (Bartlesville, Oklahoma: Living Sacrifice Book, 1999), 80.

creation, when God created us in His image for the sole purpose of glorifying Him. Out of all that God created, He exclusively created human beings that we might enjoy a personal, glorious, eternal, passionate, intimate love relationship with Him. And while the fall of mankind into sin fractured that original intent, God lovingly provided a means for our divinely created love relationship to be restored, through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Yet the sovereign work of God through the victorious work of Christ cannot fully come to fruition in the battle of our hearts – unless we give the whole of our hearts and lives back to God. John Owen wrote that, “There is no death of sin, without the death of Christ.”¹³ What this means is that there is no death of sin in our own lives without first a death of self. We cannot know the power to overcome sin and have freedom from sin until we totally surrender our lives to Jesus. “Renouncing all the ways we have turned from God in our hearts, we forsake the idols we have worshiped and give our hearts over to. We turn, and give ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, back to God, asking him to cleanse our hearts and make them new. And he does. He gives us a new heart. And he comes to dwell there, in our hearts.”¹⁴

The truth of God’s Word tells us that when we repent (the Bible’s definitive term for turning back to God), we are then empowered by God’s Holy Spirit: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Arndt writes: “If you still feel weakness of the flesh in yourself and cannot do everything you eagerly wish to do, the merit of Christ is ascribed to you as it is to a repentant man and with his perfect

¹³ John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin: A Puritan’s View of How to Deal with Sin in Your Life* (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1996, reprinted in 2003), 74.

¹⁴ John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead: The Glory of a Heart Fully Alive* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 69.

obedience your sins are covered. At this point the imputation of Christ's merits takes place and not before. Thus, the payment of merits of Christ is given to the repentant man."¹⁵ Nothing less than surrender and repentance will free us from our enslavement to our fallen sinful nature, so we can once again come alive to God and allow the crucified and risen Christ to restore what has been corrupted, and heal what has been perverted, by the power of the Holy Spirit. *Surrender to God is the key that opens the door to God's sovereign grace, the entry way where both human response and divine initiative mysteriously come together to gain victory in overcoming the sinful nature within the fallen human heart.* "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

"Though we still live in the shadow of sin in this life we have a hope out beyond the barbed wire of the present moment. We have a sovereign God who is able to restore our fortunes in any way he pleases."¹⁶ He has chosen to do so through our crucified and risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as "the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). Scripture tells us that according to the riches of God's glory we are strengthened with power through His Holy Spirit in our inner being, so that Christ might dwell in our hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:16-17). Faith then is about surrendering to god and trusting Him to empower us to live above and beyond the fallen world we live in and the fallen nature that lives within us. Faith is about choosing

¹⁵ Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*. Translation by Peter Erb. (New York, New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 89.

¹⁶ Raymond Ortlund Jr., *When God Comes to Church: A Biblical Model for Revival Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 143.

to respond in surrender to the God-sent, Christ-empowered Holy Spirit who enters our lives for the purpose of restoring us back to the image of God we were created for. This is our hope and assurance in Jesus Christ. Ray Ortland writes that, “God is the greatest junk dealer in the universe. He deals in secondhand merchandise. In his wisdom and mercy, he takes the damaged goods of our lives and he restores us. . . . this vision of God our Restorer fills the people of God with hope, even as they remain now under discipline.”¹⁷

The Path of Victory in the Battle for the Heart: Submission to the Holy Spirit

It is not only at the cross of Calvary and in the empty tomb, but also in the continuous dependence upon the living presence of God that dwells within our hearts, where we find victory in the battle of the heart. 1 Corinthians 15:57 says: “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Our victory over the sinful nature within our hearts is that which comes “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Following the lengthy description of the battle within his heart in Romans 7, the apostle Paul then proclaims:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised

¹⁷ Ortland, *When God Comes to Church*, 128.

Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:1-13)

In Romans 7 Paul had shared that in his own efforts to gain victory over the inherent sin nature within his heart (by seeking to fulfill God's commandments, requirements, "the law") he found that no matter how hard he tried, he always continued to fall far short. "Whenever he measures what he has done, he finds that he has fallen short. From this he perceives that the anti-God urge called sin, though dethroned in his heart, still dwells in his own flawed nature. Thus the Christian moral experience is that his reach persistently exceeds his grasp and that his desire for perfection is frustrated by the discomposing and distracting energies of indwelling sin."¹⁸ In Romans 8 the apostle now reveals that he discovered the means of victory over his sinful nature in "the Spirit of life" which he tells us comes from "Christ Jesus" (vv. 1-2). In Christ, God condemned "sin in the flesh" and provided His Holy Spirit to His people so that they might know the fulfillment of what He requires of them – not by their human efforts but the Spirit's divine initiative and presence (vv. 3-4). What God requires for those in Christ, in order that they might know victory over their sinful nature, is that they submit to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit: "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:5-6).

After first surrendering to God, we must then walk the path of continuous submission to the Holy Spirit if we are to fully know the empowerment to overcome the sinful nature that still lives within us. Victory in the battle of the heart comes when we

¹⁸ J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness In Our Walk With God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1984, 2005), 106-107.

respond to God's sovereign work through Jesus Christ by focusing our hearts and lives on Him, and then submitting to the power of the Spirit of God, rather than trying to gain the victory through our own efforts (vv. 5–8). When we do so, we are then controlled by “his Spirit who dwells” in us rather than our fallen sinful nature (vv. 9–11). When Paul concentrated on keeping the Law rather than on trusting Jesus, his fallen sinful nature rose up and battled the Spirit within him – and there was no lasting victory because he was fighting the battle by his own sin-saturated efforts and in his own fallen strength. But when Paul centered his heart and life on God, when he concentrated on trusting Jesus, the Spirit living within him energized his new nature and he found himself winning the battle. “The aim of God’s creative work in his people is to conform us to the image of Christ.”¹⁹ Because of this divine truth, Paul was able to write: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). “It is the glory of Christ that finally satisfies our soul. We are made for Christ, and Christ died so that every obstacle would be removed that keeps us from seeing and savoring the most satisfying treasure in the universe – namely, Christ, who is the image of God.”²⁰ As we center our hearts and lives on God, and as we submit our will to the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to fight through and live beyond our fallen nature so that we might live out our divinely created purpose to glorify God. “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

¹⁹ John Piper, *God is the Gospel* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2005), 156.

²⁰ Piper, *God is the Gospel*, 62.

“In a true Christian there must at all times be a battle between spirit and flesh.”²¹ In his classic work *The Mortification of Sin* John Owen wrote: “Now, though doubtless there may be attained, by the Spirit and Grace of Christ, a wonderful success and eminency of victory against any sin, so that a man may have almost constant triumph over it; yet an utter killing and destruction of it, that it should not be, is not in this life expected.”²² The reality is that though it is possible to know the power of the Spirit that can overcome the flesh, we will always know the battle of sin within our hearts to some degree until we go home to eternal glory. Therefore we must continue to crucify our flesh on a daily basis – even knowing that when we do choose to live from the new heart we have been given in Jesus Christ, our old fallen sinful nature will not go down without a fight. “This is the heart of our Enemy. He is determined to hinder and harm and ruin God’s image bearers. To steal and destroy. . . . the story of your life is the story of the long and brutal assault on your heart by the one who knows what you could be and fears it.”²³ The work of our enemy that began in the Garden of Eden continues even today. “The human heart, even the redeemed heart, has an allergy to God”.²⁴ Sin is the “blind, anti-God, egocentric energy in the fallen human spiritual system, ever fomenting self-centered and self-deceiving desires, ambitions, purposes, plans, attitudes, and behaviors.”²⁵ If we do not aggressively and passionately pursue victory over our fallen, sinful nature by seeking our created purpose in God through Jesus Christ – “Besetting sins that besetting sin generates”²⁶ will be our norm. Though we still possess a fallen

²¹ Arndt, *True Christianity*, 87.

²² Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, 57.

²³ Eldredge, *Waking the Dead*, 149.

²⁴ Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985), 27.

²⁵ J. I. Packer, “John Owen put me straight” *Christian History and Biography* (Issue 89, Winter 2006), 50.

²⁶ Packer, “John Owen put me straight”, 50.

sinful nature, by pursuing the glory of God in the risen Christ, we need not be defeated by our “besetting sins.”

Sin does not rule in a man as long as this battle goes on. That against which a man strives cannot rule. If it does not rule in a man because the spirit strives against it, it does not damn man. . . . Indwelling sin does not damn but ruling sin does. Since a man strives against sin and does not willingly do it, sin is not accounted him as Saint Paul says in Romans 8:1: There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.²⁷

In Romans 8:13 Paul writes: "For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." This is the declaration of victory that follows the apostle's revelation in Romans 8:1-11. He says the same in Galatians 5:16-18: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Though sin is still an issue with believers as it is with unbelievers, it need not govern them. The dominant chord for those of us in Christ is victory over sin by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It is by the power of God that we can experience substantial, significant, and observable victory over any and all sin in life.²⁸ "This is not an experience which can be worked up by human initiative. It is a gift of sovereign grace, produced by the illuminating presence of the Spirit of God."²⁹ In Philippians 2:13 Paul writes: "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

²⁷ Arndt, *True Christianity*, 88.

²⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 391.

²⁹ Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life*, 28.

Victory over sin in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ is that which comes by surrender to God and through submission to the Holy Spirit. Niebuhr writes that “God rules and overrules men in their corrupt personal and social existence.”³⁰ While we do have a human responsibility to “work out” our salvation with “fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12) “according to the Bible, success – genuine success – is the sovereign gift of God.”³¹ Once we center our hearts and lives on our God-created purpose to glorify Him, God divinely enters in and by the power of the Holy Spirit sin no longer rules over us. “Certainly there are real evil forces that we as Christians come up against in the world and in our hearts. But the outcome does not hang in the balance. Our God is a sovereign God.”³²

The Fullness of Victory in the Battle for the Heart: Joy in Jesus

Romans 8 is the God-initiated, divinely ordained restorative response to the Romans 7 cry of fallen humanity: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24). “Paul balances what the law has told Christians about themselves (“failed! weak! guilty!”) with what the gospel tells them about themselves (“loved! saved! safe!”) . . . Romans 7 depicts the cold, shadowed side that faces away from the sun, Romans 8 shows us the warm side where the sunshine is seen and felt. . . . both aspects of experience – the pain of imperfection, and the joy of assurance, hope, and spiritual progress – should be ours constantly, consciously, and

³⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1951), 213.

³¹ Samuel. Rima, *Rethinking the Successful Church: Finding Serenity in God’s Sovereignty* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2002), 170.

³² Mark. Dever, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004), 72.

conjointly.”³³ In many ways Romans 8 reflects the joy of the empty tomb that follows the Romans 7 human struggle with sin that sent Jesus to the cross; the deep, darkness and numbing pain of the sunset on Good Friday ultimately dissipated and dissolved when the full spectrum of golden glory and abundant joy rose on the sunrise of Easter morning.³⁴ Romans 7 is where we most often find ourselves, trying as we might to succeed by our own weak efforts and selfish will in the battle between the two natures within our hearts, as we try to beat down one of these masters and help the other ascend. In our strength it all “leads to nothing but endless self-effort and failure.”³⁵ Yet Romans 8 is where surrender to God and submission to the Holy Spirit come together and joyously proclaim: “Christ is my life!”³⁶

Jesus challenged us to center our lives on God and His purpose for our lives, and he said: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). The night before he went to the cross our Lord prayed for those who would surrender and receive him as Lord and Savior so “that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13). Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus, “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” That is our promise too. *When we surrender to God and submit to the Holy Spirit, we will then know the joy of victory in Jesus Christ over the fallen, sinful humanity that lives within our hearts.* Though the battle within rages on, the war has been won by the victory we have been joyfully given through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

³³ Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 106-107.

³⁴ Piper, *God is the Gospel*, 65.

³⁵ Dan Stone and Greg Smith, *The Rest of the Gospel: When the partial Gospel has worn you out* (Dallas, Texas: One Press, 2000), 96.

³⁶ Stone and Smith, *The Rest of the Gospel*, 96.

Lovelace writes: “Only by fixing our attention on God can we accurately know ourselves – both the graces he has given us and the depth of our needs.”³⁷ This was a truth the apostle Paul came to understand. While we do read of the battle within his heart in Romans 7, the apostle closes Romans 8 with these three great truths we have looked at regarding God’s heart for restoring us back to our divinely created purpose in Him:

1) It is our divinely initiated relationship with God that brings us victory, as He has created us for a glorious purpose, and He has chosen to restore us through transformation into the image of His Son which occurs when we *surrender our hearts and lives to God*. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Romans 8:28-30).

2) As we walk through this fallen world with fallen hearts, God will never forsake us nor allow sin to overtake us as we *submit and are empowered by the Holy Spirit*. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Romans 8:31-34).

³⁷ Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life*, 19.

3) Though we possess a fallen sinful nature, God still loves us, and His love is our assurance of an *ultimate, joy-filled victory in Jesus*. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35-39).

The Glory of Victory in the Battle for the Heart

There is a scene in the movie, the *Lion King*, where Simba, nearly a mature lion, is visited by the ghost of his father. The old Mufasa says to him, "Simba, you've forgotten who you are. You are so much more than you've become." Although that's not a quote from the Bible, it could well describe the battle within the human heart. Our sinful fallen nature numbs us to the reality of who we are in God and what we were created for; the battle can draw us to the place where we become much less than our original purpose. Revival is the restoration of God's glory in a people of God who have become once again centered on God and on His purpose for their lives. Everything in life – even the battle within our hearts – should be viewed as opportunity to develop our hearts, our minds, and our souls, into the character of His likeness. Life on earth is simply a training ground, a time of growth, until we realize the fullest dimensions of the glory of God in eternity. The church of today needs to pursue its created purpose to glorify God in the hearts and minds

and lives of those who claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. “We need to summon fellow believers to embrace the full scope of His supremacy. We need to make His glory the dominating theme in everything we do together as the Body of Christ, not only in how we seek Him but also in how we speak of Him.”³⁸

We do live in a day when fresh initiatives are needed to expand how those who claim Christ might fully see him and value him in all his supremacy. Jesus is the “seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15) whom God spoke of when sin entered our lives and the world we live in, the One who would one day fulfill the promise of God to restore the image of God’s glory back into God’s people. After the fall of mankind into sin, as the centuries rolled on and as Satan kept winning battles, God kept raising up men and women and children to fight the war. Then came Jesus. Then came the crucifixion. Then came the resurrection. And now we wait for his return to take us home. And though the battle still rages on, we fight on because the war is ultimately won. Jesus is our victory!

God brought this truth into my own heart life a few years ago during a deeply painful period in my life when I was experiencing an extended time of physical sickness and exhaustion. As the year began, I suddenly became physically sick, and over a period of three months I dropped over forty pounds in weight. After an endless array of medical tests, the doctors could find no cause for my sickness, and so my church graciously extended me some time off for rest to hopefully restore my health. My wife, my youngest son, and I made our way to north-central West Virginia where we rented a cabin at a pastor’s retreat center deep in the mountains. Though I was physically weak, I still pursued my normal early morning extended walks to be with the Lord to calm my soul,

³⁸ David Bryant, *Christ Is All: A Joyful Manifesto on the Supremacy of God’s Son* (New Providence, New Jersey: New Providence Publishers, 2004), 15.

and though walking in the mountains is somewhat more strenuous, I was still able to cover four to five miles every morning. One morning in particular as I left for my walk, I found myself physically hurting even more than normal, as well as feeling emotionally depressed, and spiritually numb. In many ways it was one of the lowest moments I've ever experienced, as the months of pain and struggle had finally taken a deep toll on my life. As I made my way down the steep mountain road away from our cabin in the pre-dawn light, I came across a snake – a deadly, poisonous copperhead. It lay in the middle of the road, dead, having been run over by some kind of vehicle. Its head had been crushed. Though the carcass of this brown pit viper was lifeless, it still seemed to radiate its deadly potential; even looking at it caused my own physical, emotional, and spiritual pain to deepen.

For a moment, due to the months of accumulated pain and struggle, and standing before this poisonous snake, I was overwhelmed with a deep sense of utter hopelessness. As the tears began to run down my cheeks, I was suddenly blinded by a shaft of light, as the sun just began to rise over the mountains. As I cupped my hand over my squinting eyes so that I might look up at the sunrise, I was suddenly drawn to look back down at the snake with the crushed head. I found myself repeating this back and forth, four or five times: the sunrise, then the snake; the sunrise, then the snake. It was at that moment the Lord said to me, in a voice I could hear in my heart as clear as day: "The snake is dead. The Son has risen." I stood there for some time, looking back and forth, over and over again at the dead snake and the rising sun. Those words "The snake is dead. The Son has risen." sank deep into my heart, and I felt the pain and heaviness and hopelessness lifted from my body and my spirit. As I turned to make the long laborious walk back up that

steep mountain, my tear-filled eyes were drawn to a sign with the name of the mountain on it – “Faith Mountain.” In this life, as we climb the mountain of faith we have received in Jesus Christ, it will be a steep, hard struggle, but we must always remember – God has fulfilled His promise. The Savior has come! The snake is dead! His head has been crushed! The Son has risen!

The joyful victory of knowing the restoration of God’s glory within our hearts can come about when we “walk by the Spirit, and . . . not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Here “Paul is envisioning Christian life not of constant, total defeat, but of constant moral advance.”³⁹ Though Paul knew of the incessant struggle within his own heart with his own sinful nature (Romans 7), he also had experienced the glory of victory within his heart (Romans 8) when he sought God’s sovereign presence, power and preeminence in his life: “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:2-4). God’s Word calls us to always be moving forward in our walk with Christ. Such an advance will only come about by rejecting the desires of the flesh and embracing the desires of the Spirit within our hearts. When we indulge in the Spirit, the Spirit will then empower us to a victory over the flesh. Walking in the Spirit will not make all of our struggles with sin go away. Until we go home to glory we will always feel the constant strain and pull in our hearts of imbedded perversity. Our motivations and best efforts will always be somewhat stained and infected with self-interest. Yet in our weakness we can

³⁹ Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 33.

respond by embracing the Spirit of God within, who will then empower us to victory beyond our depravity.⁴⁰

The hunger for God within all of our hearts is rooted in the truth that we were initially designed to glorify God by enjoying the fullness of all that He is. The ultimate answer to all of our struggles and problems and issues, is that our very existence is rooted in the reality that God created us for the sole purpose of glorifying Him by loving Him as supreme and preeminent and ultimate over and above all things. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the center of all things. And since God is supreme and preeminent and sovereign over and above all things, it is He whom we must look to and embrace for victory and restoration in the battle within our hearts: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). The impulse to pursue the restoration of both God's image and His purpose for your life originates with God Himself, and as such our expectation should be that we will know victory over our sinful nature when we do put God at the center of our hearts and lives: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

The tyrant of Syracuse once went to the slave-philosopher Epictetus and told him, "I'll pay the ransom for you and you will be liberated."

Epictetus replied, "Why do you care about me? Free yourself."

"But I am king," said the amazed tyrant.

"This I contest," was the answer of the philosopher. "He who masters his passions is a king even while in chains. He who is ruled by his passions is a slave even while sitting on a throne."⁴¹

Freedom from and victory over the sinful passions of our flesh within the fallen human heart comes only when our divinely created passions are once again centered on

⁴⁰ Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 34.

⁴¹ Wurmbrand, *Alone with God*, 19.

the most supreme, sovereign and preeminent God, who lovingly created us in His image for the purpose of His glory. Revival is the restoration of God's glory in a people of God who have become once again centered on God and on His purpose for their lives.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling
and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,
to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.

Amen.

Jude 24-25

CHAPTER 12

A HEART FOR GOD: THE GLORY OF GOD IN REVIVAL

And we all, with unveiled face,
 beholding the glory of the Lord,
 are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.
 For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
 2 Corinthians 3:18

A God-centered Gospel in a Self-centered Culture

Once I came to an understanding of the biblical truth that I was created in the image of God for the purpose of His glory, it transformed not only my own personal relationship and walk with the Lord, it also changed both the motivation and message of my calling in ministry. Preaching, teaching, and leading out of a divine, sovereign, God-centered perspective had a dramatic affect in the ministries I was and still continue to be involved with. I have found that those who are seek satisfaction, fulfillment, and victory in God have embraced this concept; while those who seek satisfaction, fulfillment, and victory in someone or something else tend to reject it. Almost all who hear the gospel from this perspective are initially puzzled by the idea; for the most part Christianity today begins and ends with how religion affects man, rather than how religion might glorify God. Again, it is not that our affections, desires, and yearnings are wrong; God created us in such a way as to have strong cravings and passionate longings. Our problem is the focus and depth of our affections; because we selfishly seek to glorify self rather than God, we are far too easily pacified and appeased with lesser glories than His glory. This is the battle for the heart of God's people today. It is not a new struggle but it is the frontline battle in the war for the souls of those both within and outside the contemporary church. Lovelace writes:

How has this come to be in the church, the body of Christ, God's chosen people? History has shown us that if Jesus is not supreme, if God is not the center of all things, then we are led by the default within the flesh of our hearts to a more "me-centered" approach to Christianity. Those who led the Reformation – such as Luther, Zwingli and Calvin – were fully aware of this tendency of the fallen heart, as were the leaders of the Great Awakening. But succeeding generations gradually moved away from confronting the reality of sinful self-centeredness, and instead stressed the goodness of created humanity and the kindness of God. By the Second Awakening, God was no longer presented as the supreme and sovereign Creator Being over all things, but rather as a kindly, fatherly, comprehensible God, so much so that by late nineteenth century Moody's messages were centered principally around the truth that "God is Love."¹

As we have already seen, while the self-seeking of humanity is not inherently evil in its foundational roots regarding our search for the restoration of the image of God lost in the original fall, the sinful nature that still lives within has warped and perverted the divinely-created motivation of the heart to such a degree that the original intent of God is hardly understood and barely recognizable. The fall has so corrupted the created purpose of human life to glorify God, to reflect the heart and character of God as His image-bearers, that belief now seems to be that we were created to be mirrors of self-reflection. "Some even talk of God Himself as if He were made in the image of man, rather than the other way around."² What this means is that in a day and culture where there is a pervading hunger and thirst for spirituality, the true and full gospel truth of God's purpose and intent for humanity must be preached, taught, and lived out – or many will become merely religious without truly being converted, transformed, and restored by the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. They will join churches and read their Bibles and do religious things "with no change in the foundation of their happiness. It is still

¹ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 83.

²Mark. Dever, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004), 73.

themselves. They are the ground of their joy.”³ They will still define joy as how they feel about themselves and their lives rather than the joy they were truly created for in God Himself. This creates then a bigger and deeper problem for those outside the church as they will then “interpret everything that is happening through that lens. So when the love of God is preached, they hear it to mean simply that God makes much of us. They may even have a strong affection for God as long as they see him as the endorsement of their delight in being the foundation of their own happiness. . . . If God is man-centered, they are willing to be, in a sense, God-centered.”⁴

God-centered Self-worth in a Culture of Self-esteem

As we have already seen in chapter seven, history has shown us that the Enlightenment theology which took root following the Reformation began the dramatic shift in the church towards humanity as the center of religion. Combine that shift with the modern social fabric of independence and personal entitlement we live in today, and we now have what is known as the “autonomous self.” According to David Wells, “this is the self which is not subject to outside authority and into which all reality has contracted itself. The result is a radicalized individualism whose outlook is deeply privatized and whose mood is insistently therapeutic.”⁵ This self-centered, therapeutic spirituality can best be seen in terms of how the faith community views the issue of self-esteem. While we have already taken a brief look at the difference between self-esteem as a human concept and self-worth as a Christian truth, we must also understand the effect this

³ John Piper, *God is the Gospel* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2005), 149.

⁴ Piper, *God is the Gospel*, 150.

⁵ David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 138.

difference has had on the church. Self-esteem, as a human concept, “does not begin with what has been given by God. Rather, it begins with the self.”⁶ Self-worth, as a Christian concept, begins with the reality that we were created in God’s image, and ends with the truth that despite our fallen nature, our self-worth is derived from the fact that our Savior sought to restore us back to God on the cross. Self-worth begins with God and ends with valuing oneself in and through Jesus Christ. The difference between self-esteem and self-worth is much more than just subtle and semantic – it is insidious and dangerous, as self-centered self-esteem finds and defines truth from within the fallen sinful heart. “An outside God, such as we find in biblical faith, is comprehensible because he is self-defined in his revelation; the inside god is not. The inside god is merged into the psychological texture of the seeker and found spread within the vagaries of the self. The outside God stands over against those who would know him; the inside one emerges within their consciousness and is part of them.”⁷

The true danger here is that when self-esteem is centered on the self, we find ourselves in bondage. “We cannot find lasting meaning, purpose, joy and life on our own, independent from God. Our flesh doesn’t like that. The flesh is the flesh and it does not change.”⁸ Self-esteem which is rooted in the self lives in the continuous struggle between the two natures we read of in Romans 7 without the sure hope of the glorious victory that can be embraced in Romans 8, because when truth and faith and spirituality come from within, “we choose who we want to be and nothing is allowed to impose itself on us from the outside.”⁹ The reality of our day is that many who claim Christ are not seeking the

⁶ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 132.

⁷ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 130.

⁸ Randy Meulman, *The Quest for Glory* (Dallas, Texas: John Meulman, 2005), 66-67.

⁹ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 148.

God of Christianity but the god of self. Wells laments that there are too many in the church of today who are pursuing “the god within, the god who is found within the self and in whom the self is rooted.”¹⁰

The truth of the God-centered gospel is that those who surrender their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ need not be held captive to the worldly views of esteem. “Christians must have confidence in Christ, and not feel intimidated or oppressed by the low esteem in which they are held in the world. Nor must they feel that they must give in to the world’s pressure to esteem people in terms of their achievements or possessions. Our righteousness is grounded in Christ, not in anything that we or the world can do or think.”¹¹ Even for many in the church, the God-centered love of God is a foreign concept. “Most of us, have been saturated for decades with doctrines of self-esteem. We have absorbed a definition of love that makes us the center. That is, we feel loved when someone makes much out of us.”¹² But God has already made much of us! He created us in His image, for the sole purpose of glorifying Him, and though we have fallen far from that original intent, He has restored us back to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Being created in the image of God for the purpose of His glory should awaken our souls to the reality that God has made much of us. Being saved and restored back to God by the broken body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus should be the ground, the foundation, the basis of joy. “Being loved by God is a wonderful replacement of self as the foundation of our joy. In the place of self comes the glory of God. Most people know that the greatest experiences of joy in this life

¹⁰ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 128.

¹¹ Joanna and Alister McGrath, *The Dilemma of Self-Esteem: The Cross and Christian Confidence* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1992), 133.

¹² Piper, *God is the Gospel*, 149.

– the ones that come closest to being pictures of perfect joy in heaven – are not experiences of self-affirmation, but of self-forgetfulness in the presence of something majestic.”¹³ Our self-worth in God is the protection and power we possess against despair and hopelessness in the battle within our hearts to live out our lives for God’s glory in a fallen world. The cross of Christ reveals God’s heart for us. Our self worth, even our self-esteem, must be grounded not primarily in how God loves us, but rather in who our loving God is and His loving created purpose for our lives to live for His glory in everything that we do. Piper writes:

God’s best gift is not the gift of self-esteem. God’s best gift is God – for our everlasting and ever-increasing enjoyment. Being loved by God is the exhilarating deliverance from the hall of mirrors we once thought would bring us happiness – if we could just like what we see. Heaven is not a hall of mirrors. Or maybe we should say, heaven is a world in which all created things have become mirrors, and all of them are tilted at a 45 degree angle. Everywhere we look – in every creature – we see the reflection of God.¹⁴

"We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God created us because He loves us. And because He loves us, God sought to restore us back to Himself after the fall: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Yes, "God is love" (1 John 4:8) but our self-esteem, our self-worth – our self-value – must not be centered on God’s love, but rather on God Himself. God, in His absolute sovereignty and glorious supremacy above and beyond all things, is much more than just love. He is also holy, just, merciful, and righteous. His love is an attribute, a characteristic, a quality of who He is. We must not love God just because God loves us; we must love God simply because of who He is. His love towards us is an effect of who He is. Our love for God should be the effect of who

¹³ Piper, *God is the Gospel*, 149-150.

¹⁴ Piper, *God is the Gospel*, 151-152.

we are in Him as restored image-bearers living for the glory of God. “The substance of real spirituality is love. It is not our love but God’s that moves into our consciousness, warmly affirming that he values and cares for us with infinite concern. But his love also sweeps us away from self-preoccupation into a delight in his unlimited beauty and transcendent glory.”¹⁵ “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

The Effect of Self-seeking in the Contemporary Church

How has this perverted self-seeking of God’s original intent affected the church? George Otis writes that “highlighting the seeker can distract us from the centrality of Christ. Our focus should be on the One who draws sinners rather than on the sinners who are drawn. If affirmation is needed, let it be this: Ministry is not about people; it’s about God drawing people.”¹⁶ The methods and means of the contemporary church reflect a Christian faith that is much more self-centered than God-centered. Recent studies done by researcher and author George Barna tells us that “all the evidence suggests that the vast majority of U. S. Christians are more interested in being served than serving.”¹⁷ My experience, and that of many of my ministry colleagues, is that because of such self-interest people will leave one church and transition to another for no other reason than a different church has something bigger or better to offer them. And since larger churches can offer more in terms of various programs and service options, the result is that large

¹⁵ Richard Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1985), 18.

¹⁶ George Otis Jr., *God’s Trademarks: How to Determine Whether a Message, Ministry, or Strategy is Truly from God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen Books, 2000), 137.

¹⁷ Bill Dall, “Barna: 25 years of prophetic warning for the Church”.
[<http://www.churchcentral.com/nw/s/template/Article.html?id/23839>], June 2006.

churches are growing even larger – yet research reveals overall church attendance across the board is in decline.¹⁸ Further studies reveal that as the population in America is increasing, church attendance is decreasing: “There appears to be a major increase in interest in spirituality among North Americans . . . this has not translated into greater church involvement.”¹⁹ Such research would seem to indicate that the church growth movement of our day is much more transitional (people moving from church to church) than it is conversional (people coming to faith in Christ). “The problem today is that efforts to ensure seeker understanding often devolve into an unhealthy preoccupation with hearer interests and appetites. Audiences are frequently given what they want rather than what they need. The appeal is made to their emotions rather than to their understanding.”²⁰ The result we are seeing today is that the evangelical version of spirituality “has stripped itself of doctrine – on the fallacious assumption that this doctrine won’t sell in today’s marketplace.”²¹ What this means is that while the church has learned how to lure people in, it cannot teach them the God-centered gospel, because those who come have been drawn in by a message centered around their desires for themselves rather than the purpose for which God created them. By using a method and message to bring in those who are looking for something to take, “God has come up in the short end because we get what we want and give up nothing of consequence. . . . This, of course, cheapens our understanding of God, it demeans the nature of the gospel, and it works havoc in the Church.”²²

¹⁸ George Barna, *“Trends Among Christian Believers in America”* [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_tren.htm] June 2006.

¹⁹ Barna, *“Trends Among Christian Believers in America”*.

²⁰ Otis, *God’s Trademarks*, 138.

²¹ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 314.

²² Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 314.

An effect of all this has been that “in North America the invitation to become a Christian has become largely an invitation to convert to the Church.”²³ In its pursuit to be successful in worldly terms of quantity (attendance) over quality (spiritual maturity), the body of Christ in our day has taken up with the means and methods of the marketing culture to draw people into the church. And while means and methods are not wrong in themselves, too often, because of the sinful nature that still lives within the fallen human heart that seeks to satisfy the self, the means and methods of marketing either cloud or pollute the message – and oftentimes even become the message itself. “Many of our people are severely enculturated because their relationship to Christ is so insecure that they are not free to cut loose from cultural support.”²⁴ McNeal writes: “The North American church is suffering from severe mission amnesia. It has forgotten why it exists. . . . The church was never intended to exist for itself.”²⁵ It’s hard to argue against this assessment in observing that while the mega-church movement has dramatically increased in our country, morality in our society is at a historic all time low. One need not look far to see that the church of Jesus Christ today is less influential on the culture than it is influenced by culture. “According to Barna, the church does not appear to be making a measurable transformational effect on Christian behavior.”²⁶ Sadly much too often the beliefs and behaviors of Christians and non-Christians are virtually the same in many areas of spirituality and morality. Today “in terms of actual, verifiable behavior outcomes”, those who claim to follow Christ are not looking too much like Jesus.²⁷ The

²³ Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass, 2003) 11.

²⁴ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 211.

²⁵ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 15.

²⁶ Dall, *Barna: “25 years of prophetic warning for the Church”*.

²⁷ Dall, *Barna: “25 years of prophetic warning for the Church”*.

contemporary church seems to have lost its call to be a transformational presence in a fallen world. Wells tells us that the evangelical church, in its pursuit of success, has adopted marketing strategies to pursue that end, and while marketing does work, “success can be had with very little truth.”²⁸ Yet without the truth of the God-centered gospel of Jesus Christ, success is not only void and meaningless – it is dangerous and ultimately fatal.

The truth we face is that the world into which Jesus entered was not much different than the world we live in today. “The collapse of institutional religion in the first century was accompanied by an upsurge in personal spiritual search for God and salvation. . . . Jesus tapped into this widespread sentiment of disillusionment with religion but hunger for God with his teaching about the kingdom of God and how people could become a part of it.”²⁹ While our Lord preached that God was for people not against them, he did so without the pretense of self-fulfillment as the world defined it. Instead he defined faith in God in terms of one’s relationships – our relationships with God and with other people. He declared the first and second commandments as an unconditional, surrendered love for God which empowered one to a unconditional and surrendered love for others: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31). Jesus proclaimed that faith in God was less about what you receive from God and more about what you give to God: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my

²⁸ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 313.

²⁹ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 16-17.

sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:23-25). In the midst of a self-centered, fallen world filled with spiritual wandering, Jesus announced: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). While this most likely was not the seeker-sensitive, feeling-based, self-centered message of self-affirmation many were looking for in his day, it was the truth of what a personal life-transforming experience it is to have an encounter with the living God.

The first step in coming to faith in Christ is knowledge of one's own sin and the resultant acknowledgement of one's need. The ache, the yearning within the human heart from the loss of God's created image knows this. This is the basis of our faith in Christ. This is the foundation of the message the church needs to preach and teach from the start. It is only when we become aware of the reality and seriousness of sin that we can then come to discover the love and grace and mercy and joy and glory of our most sovereign, loving God. "God's judgment of us brings home the reality of sin as a necessary precondition for making us receptive to grace. It is only when we discover that we are condemned that we turn to seek forgiveness. It is only when we discover our emptiness that we turn to fulfillment from God. God's judgment exposes our inadequacy; God's grace makes us adequate."³⁰ Lives are transformed by Jesus Christ and empowered through the Holy Spirit not by having our wishes fulfilled, our wants satisfied, and our desires gratified – but rather by the reality of our spiritual emptiness, our utter helplessness, and our great need for God. "Renewal happens as the church moves from

³⁰ McGrath, *The Dilemma of Self-Esteem*, 151.

vague theism to a clear faith in Jesus Christ. The focus of the church is not church, but Jesus! God is made known to us in Christ.”³¹

A Heart for God in the Church

In 1 Peter 4:11 we read that those of us in the church are to commit ourselves to sacrifice and serve and love one another and the world together "in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Ortland writes that "The church is the earthly platform on which God displays his saving glory"³² The glory we are to display as a church originates within the hearts and lives of each one of its members: "God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). "If we truly desire to see God's Kingdom manifest itself in our communities, our first order of business – indeed our sole 'plan and program' – must be to attract His presence."³³ There are a great number of goals that the church of Jesus Christ should seek to accomplish: preaching and teaching the Word, equipping its members to serve and lead, transformational involvement in the community and in the world to spread the joy of Jesus so that others might know him as Lord and Savior. But there is only one ultimate goal that the church is called to pursue: bringing glory to God. Glorifying God is the divinely created purpose of God's people. McIntosh writes that: "The ultimate priority of the church is not growth per se but the glory of God. . . . Our priority must always be to bring glory to our life-

³¹ Michael Slaughter, *Spiritual Entrepreneurs: 6 Principles for Risking Renewal* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995), 32.

³² Raymond Ortland Jr., *When God Comes to Church: A Biblical Model for Revival Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 171.

³³ Otis, *God's Trademarks*, 143.

giving God. As we invest our lives and energy in pursuit of this goal, and apply other principles of growth, biblical church growth will come to our churches as a by-product of our investment.”³⁴

The reality we face is that most “Christians and churches prefer the past to the present or the future, because the past is over, while the present and the future still require a lot of work.”³⁵ The adjustments we tend to make in the church today are cosmetic and superficial at best. In order to keep the saints happy or in order to draw people in the door, we change or add programs, aesthetics, events, worship styles, and sound systems. Yet Jesus proclaimed: “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). Deep and drastic change will occur when God is restored back on the throne of the hearts of His people. Deep transformation takes place when Jesus is lifted up and reflected as preeminent in the lives of those within the body of Christ. Yet the first step in pursuing the deep and drastic transformational change that is needed in the church of lifting Jesus high and far above all things, so that God might be glorified – the step of discovering our emptiness and acknowledging the depth of our depravity – is still hard for us to see through the lens of the culture and society we live in. We all, to some degree, have been so numbed by this affluence that has graciously accommodated our self-centeredness, that it is hard to think that it might lead to the loss of our souls. “If such thoughts do cross our minds, we would be inclined to suppose that souls are lost by doing large and inhumane acts of evil, not by living in the realm of shallow and empty triviality where so much of our life is moored.”³⁶

³⁴ Gary McIntosh, *Biblical Church Growth: How You Can Work with God to Build a Faithful Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2003), 59.

³⁵ Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), 50.

³⁶ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 15.

Yet the restlessness of our souls reveals that we have not found in this world that which quiets our ache, that satisfies our yearning, that fills the infinite abyss within. “His inward presence invariably proves to be elusive and so the search is always unfinished. In this searching, it is hoped, there will be found the balm of therapeutic comfort, the suggestion of meaning and of connectedness is to something larger.”³⁷ The meaning and connectedness that our restless souls ache and yearn for – is for something much larger than any therapeutic comfort we could ever find in any person, place, or thing of this world. *The therapeutic comfort and meaning and connectedness that we hunger for – is the joy of God’s presence. “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).* Jesus said he came into the world to restore us back to God so that we would know the fullness of his joy (John 15:11). “One of the marks of a restoring work of God among his people is this explosion of fresh joy. Our prissified, stiff, stilted worship is swept away as a mighty wave of joy, industrial strength joy, washes over God’s newly liberated church. Our mouths are filled with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy. . . . A church restored to the enjoyment of its inheritance in Christ sings to God with cheerful voice, serves him with mirth, and comes before him rejoicing.”³⁸ The early church grew not because they had felt-needs programs or seeker-sensitive worship or ornate facilities. They grew because the unsaved world was fascinated by how passionately and sacrificially those in the first church loved their God and how they loved one another. In the midst of great persecution many came to faith in Jesus Christ not because of what the

³⁷ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 129.

³⁸ Ortland, *When God Comes to Church*, 129.

church could offer them, but because of how those first saints sacrificially gave everything – even their lives – for the cause of Christ.

They rolled up their sleeves and worked. They plodded: right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot. They sweated. They suffered. They locked arms together in shared effort. They cooked meals and swept dusty meeting rooms and ventured into tough neighborhoods and transported important letters and sat up with sick friends through the night and wrote books and prayed and wept and prayed some more. And they refused to quit. . . . And what did the early church get out of it all? They returned with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them!³⁹

The Revival of God-centeredness in the Church

In these days the church stands at the threshold of a great opportunity. “Today we are seeing this massive return of spiritualities which would have been inconceivable only a few decades before.”⁴⁰ There is a great spiritual hunger in our midst that is much too often being fed with snacks and desserts rather than the full meal of the gospel. “Gone are the days when people understood that an avalanche has fallen between God and human beings, that human nature retains its shape as made in the image of God but has lost its relationship to God and stands in pained alienation from him.”⁴¹ The kind of deep soul intimacy that is being sought today is one that can only be experienced and satisfied from deep within the heart. “The new spiritual quest . . . seems to be rooted in a sense of homelessness in the modern world, of having been abandoned in a place where we no longer fit, and in consequence it is reaching out for something more certain, more real, more substantial.”⁴² This is the occasion when the church must move forward on its knees, confessing their addictions to self-centered morality, praying for the power of God

³⁹ Ortland, *When God Comes to Church*, 143.

⁴⁰ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 127.

⁴¹ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 164.

⁴² Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 149.

to descend from on high, praising and worshipping our most sovereign God in all His glory. “People are open to revealed truth of God if they can get it. . . . The appropriate response to the emerging world is a rebooting of the mission, a radical obedience to the ancient command, a loss of self rather than self-preoccupation, concern about service and sacrifice rather than concern about style.”⁴³ These are the days we must live out the wonderful plan of restoration we have been given in God. In the fullness of time, God sent Jesus Christ into the world, who lived and died and rose from the dead so that we might once again be restored back to God. “In order to restore us to fellowship, God designed and unfolded a wonderful mystery, the church.”⁴⁴ May we use these days to do the same for those in the church – and for others around us in the culture we live in.

As we face these times of extraordinary opportunity we are also faced with an extraordinary challenge. Can we once again become the people we were created to be? Are we willing to surrender to God and place Him at the center of our hearts and lives? “The people of God, across the ages, have learned that they can, indeed, recover their lost authenticity when they are willing to cry out to God from the depths and make good on what has gone badly.”⁴⁵ While many are asking: “*Can we* once again to be the people we were created to be?” – the greater question is: *Are we willing to be* the people we were created to be? Are we willing to acknowledge our emptiness, our need, the depth of our depravity? Are we willing to repent of our sins, of our self-centeredness, of the infection of independence and affluence of the culture we live in? “Sober considerations such as these . . . need to be placed side by side with those that are joyous. Chief among these is the fact that Christ is ruling sovereignly in our world. The New Testament repeatedly

⁴³ McNeal, *The Present Future*, 18.

⁴⁴ Gene Getz, *The Measure of a Church* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2001), 30.

⁴⁵ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 316.

states that ‘all things’ have been put under his feet.”⁴⁶ Victory will be ours in the battle between the two natures within the heart when we humbly seek anew the restorative work of God that can only be found through Jesus Christ.

Before we can ever know victory we must look beyond self-interest and proclaim the words of the John the Baptist: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Such a surrendered, God-centered response will once again release Holy Spirit among God's people, and as He has so faithfully done in the past in His people, invade and empower and transform our hearts and our lives and our churches and our communities for the glory of our most sovereign God. "God created us to be intimately connected to Him."⁴⁷ We were created to be a people who reflect God in all His glory. "The image of God is his revelatory nexus integrated into our very being. He discloses himself to us with reference to his likeness in us."⁴⁸ In this world God chose to reveal Himself to us with reference to ourselves. "As the image in a pond depends entirely upon the object casting the image, so we depend completely upon God who casts the image we are. Likewise, the glory of the image in the pond is but a shadow of the object's glory, so whatever glory we bear as his image, only derives the glory of God who cast the image."⁴⁹ Ephesians 4:22-24 tells us "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." Here we read that God calls us to put off the "old self" of self-centeredness and put on the "new self" of God-centeredness, so we might fully know

⁴⁶ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 316.

⁴⁷ Meulman, *The Quest for Glory*, 66.

⁴⁸ A. B. Caneday, *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*. Edited by John Piper, Justin Taylor, Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2003), 170.

⁴⁹ Caneday, *Beyond the Bounds*, 198.

our glorious purpose in being “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

A Heart for God: The Glory of God in Revival

One summer I was able to spend some time in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in south central Colorado, where I was able to practice my normal routine of rising early in the morning to read my Bible, and then hike for a few hours through the mountains. On this particular trip I was led to a place on the side of a mountain at about 10,000 feet in elevation that overlooked a valley with an absolutely breathtaking view. Surrounded on all four sides by the peaks of mountains, I would watch the sun rise in front of me as I sat before God and prayed. Every morning my heart was deeply moved in being overwhelmed by the divine creative magnificence and awesome beauty before me. Clearly I was insignificant here; and God was the only significant One – which is the truth that is so hard for us to embrace. Yet I was stunned by the reality that it was this same God who sought me out in the utter depravity and inability of my fallen sinful heart to intimately and eternally know Him through Jesus Christ.

Richard Wurmbrand wrote of God: “I will never be satisfied with glimpses, with possibilities and probabilities of truth. I must know Him.”⁵⁰ This is the true, deep desire of the human heart. But the path that leads to the fulfillment of that desire begins by recognizing that the fallen self, apart from God, is imprisoned by sin and cannot get there alone. Only an encounter with the living presence of God can satisfy our deeper hungers because He is the One who planted the urge and longing for Himself in our hearts. The only truly pure hearts we will ever know here on earth will be shadows we see through

⁵⁰ Richard Wurmbrand, *Alone with God* (Bartlesville, Oklahoma: Living Sacrifice Book, 1999), 21.

the fallen nature of our character – because it is then we finally become fully aware of how absolutely and totally dependent we are upon God's graceful intervention.

Because we still have within us a sinful fallen nature, we have a tendency to wander. Until we die and go home that will always be our struggle. As I've climbed and hiked through the mountains, seeking to go higher and farther, small rocks somehow seem to painfully get into the bottom of my shoes, and sharp thorns seem to find their way into the weaving of my socks. Often my knees and ankles and legs become weak and sore, and my lungs and chest ache for lack of oxygen. As a result often I need to stop to remove the rocks and thorns, rest my sore limbs and catch my breath to relieve the ache in my chest before I can continue on. The climb can be arduous, but because of the view, it has always been worth the pain and effort. While the view of the mountains is awesome, I found the view of God I am able to see through my own weakness to be even more glorious: "Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!" (1 Chronicles 16:10).

We live in a time when spirituality is popular and fashionable among many in our society, and where a great number of those who are seeking spirituality claim the Christian faith. Yet we also live in a time where the Christian church is hungering for spiritual revival and where the community of faith continues to fall victim to the same moral decline the world as a whole is experiencing. The reason for the moral decline and the deep spiritual hunger in our modern day both in the world and in the church, is the emptiness within the souls of all humanity that has come as a result of no longer centering their hearts and lives on God. When the hearts of Christians are no longer centered on God, they lose the power and witness of their divinely created image and the

purpose of the glory they were created for. In our hunger for spirituality, we often fall victim to seeking spiritual satisfaction and fulfillment in ways and means and purposes that are not of God. Though sin has severely damaged the image of God within fallen humanity and distracted many from their divinely created purpose to glorify God, revival is the sovereign means by which the created image of God and the purpose of His glory can be restored back into the hearts of His people. When God becomes the supreme center of the heart affections of His people, the image of His glory is once again reflected within them, and those who are lost without Christ are drawn to salvation by the glory of God they see within His people.

Maurice Roberts has written: “The church’s mission is to ‘bring forth fruit’ to the glory of God. Christians are to be visible saints, and their lives are to be devoted to one ambition, glorifying God and spreading the knowledge of his truth among men.”⁵¹ I believe that as God’s people once again seek the true fulfillment of their God-created purpose and joyfully realize the restoration of the image of God’s glory back into their lives, that revival will come. Revival is the restoration of God’s glory in a people whose hearts have become re-centered on God and His purpose for their lives. Like a moth is drawn to the fire of a flame, so are the hearts of fallen humanity continually drawn back to their divinely created image and purpose to glorify their most loving Creator. As the sun dominates the sky and provides the gravitational center for the solar system, may we center our hearts and lives on God, and be consumed with a passion to reflect His sovereign glory in all things.

⁵¹ Maurice Roberts, *Great God of Wonders* (Edinburgh, England: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2003), 38.

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will be seen upon you.
And nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your rising.
Isaiah 60:1-3

CHAPTER 13

A HEART FOR GOD: SHARING THE GLORY

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,
 we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
 Through him we have also obtained access by faith
 into this grace in which we stand,
 and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
 Romans 5:1-2

Salvation is coming home, being restored back to the image of the glory of God we were created for. This truth not only transformed my life and my perspective on ministry, it also changed my perspective in the area of evangelism. The most honest among us who are called to evangelistic ministries will admit that the long-term retention rate of those who respond to an invitation of the gospel is often quite low; in the long run many more seem to fall away than stick with their profession of faith in Jesus Christ. “Most cutting-edge evangelistic churches have major problems with low retention of converts.”¹ The truth is, decisions for Christ are not necessarily conversions. Eugene Peterson writes:

It is not difficult in such a world to get a person interested in the message of the gospel; it is terribly difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. . . . There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for the long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.²

As I began to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ from a God-centered, created-in-the-image-of-God-for-His-glory point of view, I found the results to be much deeper and lasting in the longer course of people’s lives. Preaching and teaching the glory of God transformed both my *motivation* and my *message* for evangelistic ministry.

¹ George Barna, *Evangelism That Works* (Ventura, California: Gospel Light, 1995), 131.

² Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 16.

The Effect of Self-seeking on Evangelism

The *motivation* and *message* of evangelistic ministry today has also been dramatically affected by the culture of self-interest and its effect on the church, both in the means and methods to get people to respond to the Gospel (the motivation) and the Gospel itself (the message). Many in our day have studied and written on this problem, as these two issues are so intimately intertwined that they are almost impossible to separate. John Piper seeks to clarify the connection between the two in his book *God is the Gospel* by stating that the contemporary motivational emphasis of self-interest has caused the gospel message to change moving dramatically away from God's original intent. "The Christian gospel is not merely that Jesus died and rose again; and not merely that these events appease God's wrath, forgive sin, and justify sinners; and not merely that this redemption gets us out of hell and into heaven; but that they bring us to the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ as our supreme, all-satisfying, and everlasting treasure. 'Christ . . . suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us back to God' (1 Peter 3:18)."³ In his book *The Deliberate Church* Mark Dever writes: "Some evangelism strategies seek to make the Gospel attractive to unbelievers by fronting all the benefits of Christianity and saving the costs for later. They promise that you'll experience more satisfaction, less stress, a better sense of community, and an increased sense of meaning in life – and you'll be prepared for eternity to boot! – if you'll just make a decision for Christ right now."⁴ The problem with such tactics is that while it may very well appeal to those who are listening, it is not the good news of the gospel as defined by Jesus. He said: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his

³ John Piper, *God is the Gospel* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2005), 167.

⁴ Mark Dever, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2005), 56.

cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24) which had no appeal for the rich young man to whom Christ said: "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mark 10:21). Many today who claim Christ are like the rich young man who walked away when challenged to surrender it all for the cause of saving his soul. The problem with the message that exalts personal wants and desires over the commands of our Lord, is that the message of Gospel is then all about the happiness of "self" and not about the glory of God.

Now granted, we are the beneficiaries and God is the benefactor. We're not the ones "doing God a favor" by becoming Christians. Yet the Gospel is not ultimately about me. It's about God making His holiness and sovereign mercy known. It is about God's glory, and gathering worshipers for Himself who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. It is about God vindicating His holiness by punishing Christ for the sins of all those who repent and believe. It's about making a name for Himself in the world by gathering a people and separating them to Himself for the spread of His fame to the nations.⁵

The problem we face is that such "benefit evangelism" might fill our churches with people, but they will be people who are taught to expect everything to go their way just because they have become Christians. The reality is that Jesus never promised us benefits as the world knows them. Rather he promised struggle, pain, and persecution for those who would deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Him. And even then, in his desire to restore the image and purpose of God back into God's people, Jesus did not call them to just endure the hardship of struggle, pain, and persecution. Rather Christ sought to restore God's heart and character back into the hearts and lives God's people, so that they could joyfully endure through times of suffering, struggle, pain, and persecution. Jesus taught that there are no temporary, worldly benefits that can compare to the value of embracing the restored image of God's glory back into your heart and life. God does

⁵ Dever, *The Deliberate Church*, 56.

not call people to Himself so that their lives will be easier, more comfortable and stress free. God calls people to Himself so they might repent of their sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and joyfully take up their cross and follow Him for the glory of God. "There are indeed wonderful benefits to the Christian life; but being God-centered in our evangelism by focusing less on the temporal benefits and more on God's character and plan makes for more Christians ready to suffer, and more churches motivated by God's glory."⁶ Hebrews 12:2 tells us that "for the joy that was set before" him Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God." The true call of Christ is that those who respond to him and follow him should expect to share in the same experience of struggle and glory.

The Motivation for Sharing the Gospel of God's Glory

As we have seen, Jesus declared in the Greatest Commandment that we are to live out our God-created purpose in life of glorifying God by loving God: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). This is to be *our motivation for evangelism* as the second greatest commandment – "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) – *is the heart motivation to lovingly share the message of the glory of God which flows out of the first part of the Greatest Commandment.* The first commandment is the basis of the second commandment. The Bible clearly reveals that our love for one another is an empowering response to God's love for us. In 1 John 4 we read: "Let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:7-8); "If we love

⁶ Dever, *The Deliberate Church*, 56- 57.

one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us" (1 John 4:12); "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19); "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20).

Our love for others solely depends upon our love for God. When you love God with all of your heart, mind, soul, strength, with everything you are, you will then naturally love others as God loves them. Once we have come "back home" to God, a natural loving response would be love others as God loves them by also leading them "back home" to God so they might also fully know God's created purpose and love in their own lives. In the Greatest Commandment Jesus was describing the reality of that purpose for our lives, a relational love that starts with God loving us, which continues with our love for Him, and then overflows into a love for one another. When we love God the way we ought, we will love others as sacrificially as He already does. Jesus spoke of this on the night before his crucifixion:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

"Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. . . . I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:24, 26)

J. I. Packer writes that the primary and fundamental motive in evangelism should be to glorify God. We glorify God, he argues, "by obeying His word and fulfilling His revealed will."⁷ Of course the foremost of God's commandments and will is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with

⁷ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1961), 73.

all your strength . . . and . . . love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31). When we do truly love God,, and truly love others as a result, we will then "muster all our initiative and enterprise to make the most that we can of every situation for Their glory – and one chief way of doing this is to seek out ways and means of spreading the gospel, and obeying the divine command to make disciples everywhere."⁸

The motive for evangelism is rooted in the hope and promise that we have in Jesus Christ: the motive that God created us so that we would seek and find satisfaction in the restoration of His image in our lives, that we would seek and find joy in the greatness of His glory, and that His love for us would empower us to love Him and love one another as He first loved us. As we love God and love one another, God's love is magnified in us and through us. And as God's love is magnified in us and through us, the lost world around us will be drawn to a living faith in Jesus Christ, and the glory of God's name is then magnified in all the world. There is no greater witness, there is no greater evangelistic tool or method, there is no greater motive to reach the lost for Christ than loving God more than anything and everything else in life. Every human being was created for the purpose of a love relationship with God. When others see love in us, when they smell the sweet fragrance of God's presence and see the power of the resurrected Christ within us, the divinely created urge for the restoration of God's glory is ignited by the Holy Spirit deep within their souls. Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). It is God's desire that our greatest passion in life would be to love Him and embrace the depths of His heart over and above all things in this world. When we do that, He is given the greatest glory. Our motive for

⁸ Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, 73-79.

evangelism falls on the purpose of our created being to glorify God by joyfully loving Him.

My experience has been that those with whom we share the gospel message can sense our motivation in their spirit. If we are simply trying as best as humanly possible to get them through the process and make some sort of a decision for Christ after being pressured like an aggressive used car salesman, they will simply tell us what we want to hear to take the pressure off. But if our motivation flows out of God's love for us and our love for God, they will sense that too, and will be more willing to listen and respond. More importantly, if our motivation flows out of God's love rather than human love or human effort, there is no pressure, as it is God working in His time and in His way that ultimately results not just in a emotional decision, but in a long term life-changing, heart-transforming conversion. "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

The Message in Sharing the Gospel of God's Glory

Just like our motive for evangelism, *our message for evangelism must also flow out of the purpose of our created being. The message for evangelism is that in His sovereignty God created us for the purpose of His glory.* This God-centered (Theocentric) model runs against the grain of the modern man-centered (anthropocentric) model for evangelistic preaching and teaching in our day. Within the contemporary culture and society we live in, methods and means that appeal to the emotions are initially much more successful, as they appeal to the fulfilling of the cultural self-centeredness

which is rooted in our sinful human nature. As we have seen, there is a foundational aspect of evangelism that is self-centered and selfish, but much of the message in our day has strayed far from the God-centered gospel message of the Bible. The modern gospel message is most often created to appeal to the self-centeredness of our fallen human nature rather than appealing to the divinely created God-centeredness of the soul. More often than not, the promise of the kingdom as the world defines it is put forth rather than the Kingdom as Jesus describes it. Health, wealth, and prosperity evangelism may draw more of an initial response and may seem to be more successful at the outset, but when the standard of satisfaction is defined in human terms rather than by God, the long-term results, when it comes to long-term life transformations, will always be inadequate. God-centered evangelism “does not put us above God when we seek him out of self-interest” as such a self-interest seeks “the pleasure which is in God himself” and “does not make a god out of pleasure.”⁹ The true and satisfying pleasure God created us for – is Himself: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).

The message that God created us in His image for the purpose of His glory puts God in His proper place at the center of our faith. God’s glory suddenly becomes the centerpiece of our salvation, not our human desires, needs, and emotions. It is by His sovereign will and purpose we come to faith and not by our sinful human will and purposes. This truth has helped many I’ve worked with understand that even though they are responsible for responding to the urging of the Holy Spirit, and even though they are responsible to obey the principles of God’s Word, they are not wholly responsible for the results of life itself. God is sovereign in all things: “We know that for those who love

⁹ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1986), 18.

God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). This truth gives hope in times of struggle and failure, pain and suffering. Being created in the image of God for the purpose of His glory not only helps us to persevere through tough times, it also drives us to go deeper into God's heart. This perspective also makes sense of the biblical mandate to draw nearer to God, to seek God, to walk with God, to grow deeper in our faith, be more Christ-like, to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus. "To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).

Being created for the purpose of God's glory is a truth that appeals to the heart of those who are truly seeking God. Hearts that are truly seeking God seem to be much more intrigued and interested in a gospel message that starts at the top (being created in God's image for God's glory) instead of the bottom (the sinful nature of man). Most often those who are seeking God have already reached the bottom someplace in their lives. They need hope in something beyond themselves; they need a vision of something greater than their feelings and situations and circumstances; they need strength beyond their weaknesses and abilities. When you hear the message that the image of God and the purpose of His glory were created within you at the day of your birth – and that while sin has broken and warped that glorious image, God is at work seeking to restore the image of His glory back into your life through the crucified and risen Christ – the act of joyfully surrendering and submitting your life to Jesus seems not so difficult, and much more

appealing. The truth of the gospel is that it is not by your effort you come to faith in Christ, but rather by your surrender to God. God is doing His work in you; your responsibility is to surrender to God and obediently submit to His Holy Spirit. It is good news to know that God is sovereign over all of creation, over all of history, over your situation and circumstance in life, over your sinful nature, over your decisions and choices and human will, over your struggles and pains and failures. "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (Romans 9:16).

For those who are in despair, who are hurting, who are lost, and who are struggling and suffering and in pain, this message gives them greater hope than anything this world could offer them. Sadly, oftentimes this message is much less appealing than what the church has been offering them. It is good news to know that the image of our most loving and merciful God has already been pressed and imprinted into the fabric of your heart and soul, and by receiving Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior you are allowing Him to begin the work of restoring the glory of His image back into your life. It is good news to know that while your current situation and circumstance may be painful and troubled, that God has been at work in your life since the beginning of creation, and that He is at work in your life today, and by the sovereign power of His grace the purpose of His glory for your life will come to pass in the future. When God is sovereign in His purpose for your life, it's not as hard to trust Him when the path of your life has led you into the darkness. When heaven is already your home, knowing that Jesus came into your life just to lead you back home makes it easier to follow His voice, even when you can't see Him.

The Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility in Evangelism

God's glory is foundationally significant to the purpose and message of salvation: "But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). God's Word here is telling us that in His sovereignty God "chose" and has "called" His people to find their greatest joy and satisfaction in Him as they "gain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ." God is sovereign in the process of restoring the image of His glory back into His people through salvation in Jesus Christ. As much as we like to believe we are fully submissive to the sovereignty of God, we all have areas in our lives that we have fenced off from God's control, as though God could be sovereign in some areas of our life but not in others. Most Christians profess to believe in the sovereignty of God but refuse to grant that He can operate in certain areas of their lives. For some who claim Christ, only death is delegated as a sovereign act of God, since humanity ultimately has no control over it. Natural disasters, "acts of God", are also given over to divine sovereignty. But it seems many today who profess to be born-again evangelicals refuse to grant God His sovereignty when it comes to salvation.

Many are willing to grant God the acclaim for the work of Christ on the cross and give Him the authority of the Holy Spirit to work in drawing men to faith – yet they are not willing to give God complete control in bringing lost sinners to Himself. Scripture though tells us that created human beings do have a role to play in the process of salvation, but clearly God is sovereign, in complete control of the process. In Romans

9:15 God says: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Romans 9:15). Martin Luther expressed the need for a clearer understanding of this concept: "It behooves us to be very certain about the distinction between God's power and our own, God's work and our own, if we want to live a godly life."¹⁰ Spurgeon considered the truth of God's sovereign hand in the process of salvation to be foundationally important to our faith in Jesus Christ:

If any man be saved, he is saved by divine grace and by divine grace alone; the reason of his salvation is not to be found in him, but in God. We are not saved as the result of anything that we do or that we will, but we will and do as the result of God's good pleasure and the work of His grace in our hearts. No sinner can prevent God; that is, he cannot go before Him, cannot anticipate Him. God is always first in the matter of salvation. He is before our convictions, before our desires, before our fears, and before our hopes. All that is good or ever will be good in us is preceded by the grace of God and is the effect of a divine cause within.¹¹

The truth that the grace of God is sovereign is found clearly throughout the Bible:

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:44)

"This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." (John 6:65)

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." (John 15:16)

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul. (Acts 16:14)

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster, 1975), 117,

¹¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Classic Sermons on the Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1994), 114-115. Citing a sermon preached by Charles Haddon Spurgeon on August 1, 1858, at the Music Hall, Royal Surrey Gardens, London, England.

trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)

He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)

Jan Hettinga writes, "As the Spirit penetrates the human spirit that is turned in upon itself with the truth about sin, righteousness, and the judicial authority of God, an ability to respond is born (John 16:8-11). This is the door to new life in Christ: the option to turn from *self-centeredness* to *God-centeredness* is now open. Each individual is responsible to submit to God's Spirit-inspired truth."¹² As the Holy Spirit penetrates the hardness of the human heart, the image of God that we were created for is awakened once again to know the purpose of God's glory. We read of the process in Romans 8:27: "He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27). Spurgeon spoke of this event in his own life:

Born, as all of us are by nature . . . I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit, and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me...I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths in my own soul – when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron. . . .

One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God, I was not thinking much about the preacher's sermon, for I did not believe it. The thought struck me, "How did you come to be a Christian?" I sought the Lord. "But how did you come to seek the Lord?" The truth flashed across my mind in a moment – I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, How came I to pray? I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came I to read the Scriptures? I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day,

¹² Jan David Hettinga, *Follow Me* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1996), 72.

and I desire to make this my constant confession, "I ascribe my change wholly to God."¹³

The message for evangelism is that in His sovereignty God created us in His image for the purpose of His glory. Ephesians 1:11-12 tells us that in Jesus Christ "we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:11-12). By His providential nature God has been directing or allowing every process and every event to proceed towards the fulfillment of His sovereign and eternal plan to restore fallen humanity back to Himself for the purpose of His glory. At the event of the fall of mankind, God providentially put into effect a plan He had devised before creation to deliver His people from the condemnation of their sin; "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). The sovereign God who initiated His plan and purpose of salvation at the fall on humanity into sin in the Garden of Eden, is the same sovereign God who continues to initiate His plan and purpose in the hearts of His people even today: "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

J. I. Packer writes that, "far from inhibiting evangelism, faith in the sovereignty of God's government and grace is the only thing that can sustain it, for it is the only thing that can give us the resilience we need if we are to evangelize boldly, persistently, and not be daunted by temporary setbacks."¹⁴ Packer contends that whether they want to admit it or not, everyone believes that it is God alone who initiates the heart response in

¹³ Charles Spurgeon, *Autobiography* (Edinburgh, England: Banner of Truth, 1981), 164-165.

¹⁴ Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, 10.

those whom He calls to salvation, by reason of the fact that we appeal to God through the means of prayer for the salvation of the lost. He writes: “When you pray for unconverted people, you do so on the assumption that it is in God’s power to bring them to faith. . . . You know that it is God who saves men; you know that what makes men turn to God is God’s own gracious work of drawing them to Himself.”¹⁵ The Word of God teaches that God is sovereign in empowering fallen humanity choose salvation, the Bible also teaches the truth that fallen humanity is responsible for their actions. We must, Packer suggests, “let the two truths live side by side”¹⁶ if we are truly going to lead the lost to Christ.

Historically there has been a tension between the two biblical truths of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, particularly in the area of the process of salvation. Wayne Grudem defines the tension theologically, where one side argues “that God wills to preserve the free will of man more than he wills to save everyone” while the other argues “that God deems his glory more important than saving everyone.”¹⁷ Packer contends that the free will human beings have been given is not the free will to choose or to do anything they want, but instead we have been given the human responsibility to respond obediently to God’s principles and purposes. He writes: “Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is also divinely controlled; a man is divinely controlled, though he is also a responsible moral agent. . . . A God whom we could understand exhaustively, and whose revelation of Himself confronted us with no mystery whatsoever, would be a God in man’s image, and therefore an imaginary God, not the God of the Bible at all.”¹⁸ God created mankind in His image for the purpose of giving Him glory. Our created

¹⁵ Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, 15.

¹⁶ Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, 16.

¹⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 684.

¹⁸ Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, 23-24.

existence and our created purpose begin and end with God. “The gospel starts by teaching us that we, as creatures, are absolutely dependent on God, and that He, as Creator, has an absolute claim on us. Only when we have learned this can we see what sin is, and only when we see what sin is can we understand the good news of salvation from sin. We must know what it means to call God Creator before we can grasp what it means to speak of Him as Redeemer.”¹⁹

A Heart for God: Sharing the Glory

Edwards once wrote that “the glory of God is the ultimate end of the work of redemption, which is the chief work of providence towards the moral world, as is abundantly manifest from Scripture.”²⁰ This statement brings together both mankind’s created purpose (in the glory of God) and the sovereignty of God (in evangelism). The apostle Paul also brought these two truths together when he said: “Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

¹⁹ Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, 59.

²⁰ Jonathan Edwards, “A Dissertation Concerning The End for Which God Created the World, Chapter II, Section III” [<http://www.jonathanedwards.com/text/2D/The%20End%20chpt%202.htm>], July 2006. Also fully cited with clarifying footnotes in *God’s Passion for His Glory* by John Piper (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1998), 206.

The ransomed of the Lord will return.
They will enter Zion with singing;
Everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
And sorrow and sighing will flee away.
Isaiah 35:10

APPENDIX ONE

FOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE THAT ARE COMMON TO ALL OF HUMANITY

My doctoral thesis in question and answer form – for the purpose of evangelism.

Four Questions About Life That Are Common To All Of Humanity

1) Who am I?

A unique, living, spiritual being created in the image of a sovereign and holy God.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:26-27)

2) What is my purpose?

To glorify God by living for God in a manner that reflects His supremacy and preeminence through our deep joy and satisfaction in Him in all that we say and do.

"Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name . . . whom I formed and made . . . I created for my glory." (Isaiah 43:6-7)

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

3) What is wrong with the world?

The entrance of sin into the world fatally corrupted God's image in human beings, diverting them away from centering their hearts on God and His created purpose for their lives to glorify Him, resulting in God's condemnation that leads to death.

"I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another." (Isaiah 42:8)

For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. (John 12:43)

These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

For the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)

4) How can what is wrong with the world – be made right?

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ died on a cross and rose from the dead for sinners like us, who have sought and lived for self-centered glories – so that we might once again be restored to the glory of God and the purpose of God we were created for. Surrendering our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is the only way we will ever find deep satisfaction and lasting joy in this life, and in the life beyond this life. When God becomes the supreme center of our affections, He is then glorified – as His original image and purpose are then restored back into our hearts as was intended from the beginning of creation.

For the wages of sin is death . . . but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

For Christ... died for sins once for all, [the] just for [the] unjust, in order that He might bring us to God. (1 Peter 3:1)

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness. (Psalm 17:15)

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. (1 Peter 1:8)

APPENDIX TWO

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

This is a sermon that was delivered by Rev. Lee Botzet to the inmates of Jackson Correctional Institution in Black River Falls, Wisconsin on Friday October 8, 2004 and to the congregation at Salem Baptist Church, Eau Claire, Wisconsin on Sunday August 21, 2005.

In ancient China, the people desired security from the barbaric invaders to the north. To get this protection, they built the Great Wall of China. The wall is 30 feet high, 18 feet thick, and more than 1,500 miles long! The purpose of building the wall was to erect an absolutely impenetrable defense—too high to climb over, too thick to break down, and too long to go around. But - during the first hundred years of the wall's existence China was successfully invaded three times. It wasn't the wall's fault. During all three invasions, the barbaric invaders never climbed over the wall, never broke it down, never went around it. They simply bribed a gatekeeper and then marched right in through an open door. The wall failed to hold back the invaders because the gatekeeper failed to live out the purpose of the wall.

The truth is, just like the gatekeeper most of our pains and struggles and failures in life come about because we are failing to live out the true purpose of our lives. If we don't know God's purpose for our lives, or if we know God's purpose but are not in alignment with it, then we will find ourselves on a collision course with God's will, and you don't have to guess at who's going to come out on top when those two forces meet. Our will versus the will of the One who created us? No chance in eternity we would survive that! But, nothing in this world - nothing - will fill your life with as much joy and fulfillment and energy and passion and glory than knowing the purpose of God for your life and embracing that purpose with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength so that you might live fully and wholeheartedly in harmony with that purpose.

Our text for this morning reveals to us that purpose, that meaning – the purpose for which God created us. Reading from Isaiah 43:1-7:

"But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Now, the meaning of these verses has primary interpretation towards the nation of Israel; God is promising to sustain them, to deliver them from captivity, and ultimately to claim them and gather them together in His millennial Kingdom. The main point and principle here is to encourage God's people not to fear what man or nature can do to them. This is the command repeated in verse 1 and verse 5 – *“Do not fear for I have redeemed you... do not fear for I am with you.”*

After each of these commands - *“do not fear”* - God gives His reasons why His people should not fear. In verses one through four God tells Israel they should not fear because God has proven Himself faithful in the past - *“for I have redeemed you (from the bondage of slavery) I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters (parting of the Red Sea) I will be with you; And through the rivers (crossing of the Jordan River) they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace) you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you.”*

“For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place. Since you are precious in My sight, Since you are honored and I love you, I will give other men in your place and other peoples in exchange for your life.” Here God is saying, “I have conquered and crushed and vanquished other people of the world in order to save you; I have ransomed other nations for you, allowed them to pay your penalty, exchanged their lives for yours because *“you are precious in My sight... and I love you.”* Past history proves God loves His people.

In verses five through seven God tells Israel that that they should not fear because as God has proven Himself faithful in the past towards His people, He also promises them a glorious future... *“Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, And gather you from the west. I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring My sons from afar, And My daughters from the ends of the earth, Everyone who is called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.”*

In these verses, God reminds His people that they have a bright future and great hope far and beyond what they could ever imagine. He promises to gather them together and bring them back once again to the promised land. When the Lord returns, this will become a reality; the Palestinian issue will be resolved, the Middle East crises will end, and Israel will again rest in peace – those among the Hebrew people whom God has chosen will once again occupy all that is theirs. These verses speak not only to the people of Israel, they also call us deep into God's heart, as it is here the question of the purpose of life is answered. In verse four God said to Israel, *“you are precious in My sight... and I love you.”* In order for the family of God - Israel - to be precious in God's sight, they had to exist. I have children that are precious to me and I love them. But they were not precious to me and I did not love them in 1980 because they did not yet exist, they had not been created nor conceived. So why was Israel planned, conceived and created? For what purpose did God bring into existence a people whom He would ultimately regard as precious, a people whom He would love?

Verse seven gives us the answer: "God created Israel for His glory." The existence of Israel was planned and conceived and created because it was God's desire to reveal His glory through those particular people He had created for that purpose. Such was God's plan as He revealed it to Abraham, the great patriarch of the Hebrew people when God told Him, *"Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 12:1-2). Through the generations that followed, as the world watched the blessing of God work through His people, the power of His glory was revealed.

This was God's plan from the beginning. In Genesis 2 we read that God created man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into man's nostrils the life-giving glory of God in creating man in His own image. Not long after, in Genesis 3, man and woman choose a lesser glory than God for their lives and sin entered the world. In verse 15 of that chapter we read of God's promise to restore His glory unto sinful man; in pronouncing judgment on Satan for causing the fall of man, as God said, "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." God would plant His seed into human flesh, who would then come to bruise, to crush, to destroy the consequences of sin by death on a cross for the cause to restore the life-giving glory in the lives who would receive Him as Lord and Savior.

But reading on we find that the darkness of sin grew in the hearts of men. We read in Genesis 6:5 "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." The wickedness and evil thoughts continued on as Genesis 11 tells us that those whom He had created for His glory gathered together and said, "Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name" (Genesis 11:4).

The act of choosing to eat of the forbidden tree in order to be like God, in order to be independent of God and to find wisdom in their own right - began the enslavement of the human race to their own rebellious hearts, an enslavement that hates to rely on God but loves to make a name for itself. As men gathered to build the tower of Babel, God frustrated their efforts for He had a greater plan, a more glorious purpose for His creation.

Mankind was created for the purpose to solely depend on God and give Him glory. Instead man chose to rely on himself and seek his own glory - to make a name for himself. So God chose one man - Abraham - and promised to achieve the greatest purpose of His glory through Abraham and his descendants. He would make Abraham's name great, so that God and not man would get the glory.

Brothers and sisters, we were created from the beginning in God's image that we might reflect God's glory. That is our purpose, our mission in life. We are called to multiply and fill the earth so that the knowledge of the glory of God would cover the world - "For the

earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14). And ever since the fall of man, the world has resisted and refused to embrace this divine purpose of God. But ever since the beginning of time, all that God had been doing, is doing, and will do is aimed at seeing that purpose fulfilled.

The Bible tells us over and over that this is the purpose of our lives. “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). “Whoever speaks, [let him speak,] as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, [let him do so] as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:11).

What is God’s glory? The words used for glory throughout the Old and New Testament describe a shining or a revealing of God – praise, majesty, honor, beauty, holiness, adoration, splendor. Basically God’s glory could be described as a reflection of Himself. The Bible tells us that God’s glory is three things...

God’s glory is the holy light that shines from God’s PRESENCE - “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34).

God’s glory is His POWER - “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands” (Psalm 19:1).

God’s glory defined in His PREEMINENCE (“supreme, superior, or dominant) - “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Now when God says that He created us for His glory in Isaiah 43:7, He is telling us that He created us to display His glory, that is, that His glory might be known and praised. In our sinful human state, we will never know the totality of God’s excellence or beauty or perfection or magnificence or purity or holiness. The purpose of God is that we would tune our hearts in harmony with his so that our attitudes and actions would reflect His glory. It is God’s desire that our greatest passion in life would be to know and embrace the depths of God’s heart for His glory over all things in this world. When we do, He is given the greatest glory.

Brothers and sisters, that is our first and foremost, our primary purpose in life. When seeking to know the restoration of the glory of God we were created for is NOT the number one passion of our lives, God is dishonored and we become so much less that we could be. Any and all other purposes will fail and fall far and away short of God’s purpose.

When we lose the perspective that magnifying God's glory is the purpose of our lives, the power of the redemption – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – begins to ebb away also. When the glory of God is not passionately embraced, pitiful substitutes arise -- man centered philosophies that exalt human values in a way that distorts the work of redemption and deprecates the centrality of God. Sadly we must face the reality that God-centeredness has been lost in our day. Man and his comfort and his wants and felt needs have now become the star in the drama we live in called life. More than glory, health, wealth and prosperity have now become the greatest purpose. God is on stage, but only in a supporting actor as He adjusts to the many cultural expectations of our time.

God will not allow His name to be profaned indefinitely. Though He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, He will not tolerate forever those who do not give Him greatest glory, who regard something else more worthy. As God says in Isaiah 42:8 "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another." It is a fearful thing to be in opposition to the purposes God has created you for. The result of belittling the glory of God, of preferring other things above Him is that God shuts us out from enjoying the glory we were created for – forever. "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

In seeking other glories, God's plan and purpose for our lives will not come to pass; this is the truth the Bible reveals when it says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) for "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Pursuing other glories rather than God's greatest glory does lead to death, both here and in the hereafter. If the Word of God stopped here, we all would be doomed to a hopeless future of pain and despair.

But God. But God. "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ died for sinners like us so that we might once again be restored to the glory we were created for. "For Christ... died for sins once for all, [the] just for [the] unjust, in order that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:1). Coming back home "to God" – to the image of the glory of God – is the only place where we will find deep and lasting satisfaction and joy, and ultimately an eternal life of glory beyond death on this earth.

That is our hope and promise in Jesus - that God created us so that we would seek and find satisfaction and joy in the greatness of His glory, magnifying the glory of His name in all the world. It starts with the surrender of our own hearts to seek the glory of God in our own lives - a white hot consuming passion of joy, a sweet fragrance God's sovereign grace which draws those who are lost in the darkness of their sin into the live-giving, heart-transforming light of the risen Savior. There is no greater purpose in all the world than seeking to be immersed in God's glory. All other purposes rise and fall on the purpose of our created being.

Dr. John Piper puts it this way: “Our greatest enemy is not poison but apple pie.” It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for God’s glory but the endless snacking at the table of this world. The greatest adversaries of God’s glory are not sin, the devil, and his demons - but of the very blessings that God gives us. Many times we allow God’s blessings take preeminence over God Himself. Waving flags and blowing whistles over what God has done does not give Him glory; a life transformed by the heart of God does. When we seek the glory of God on this earth by this world’s devices, in the ways of this world, by the standards and measures of this world, the shine is directed away from God and pointed at us.

God’s glory is preeminent when the actual, lived-out reality of our preference for Him over all things is at work – in our thoughts, conversations, actions, and deeds. He wills that our testimonies be less of the mouth and more of life and attitude, seeking God even over His gifts. A real, lived-out human act of preference for God – over His blessings – is the actual lived out glorification of God. We glorify God in preferring Him above any and all things – His preeminence.

The key to a Spirit-filled life – is to be Spirit-filled. The key to answered prayer – is to pray. The key to wisdom and knowledge – is a passionate love and continuous study of God’s Word. The key to church growth – is to follow Jesus with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Sold out. Decreasing, so that He might increase. God’s glory will not shine by what we say and what we do; His glory shines by who we are and by who takes first place in our lives.

When we don’t feel strong desires for the manifestation of God’s glory in our lives, it is not because we have drunk too deeply of the living waters and eaten too much of the bread of life. God is not preeminent in us because we have nibbled and snacked too long at the table of this world. Too often our souls are stuffed full of the junk food of life and there is no great desire for God. He is with us, He has blessed us, God is good – all the time. So what else is there? Since Jesus has already died for our sins, and He rose from the dead, He has saved us, He has promised us eternal life - why then fervently seek the greatest gift of all – the glory of God? Because it the reason, the purpose for which God created us. *“Everyone who is called by My name... whom I have formed, even whom I have made... I have created for My glory”* (Isaiah 43:7). True salvation in Jesus Christ hungers for that glory.

In July of 1994, Brian Kelly lay in his bed in a hospital in Detroit, Michigan dying from a number of complications from surgery on his intestines. Knowing he would soon die, Kelly told his family what he wanted done with his remains. His request was unusual, but his family granted it. Two days after his death Kelly’s boss, Mary McCavit, at Independence Professional Fireworks shop in Osseo, Michigan rolled up Brian Kelly’s ashes in a twelve-inch round fireworks shell. On Friday, August 12th, at a convention of fireworks technicians near Pittsburgh, they shot that shell into the sky. It trailed two silvery comet tails as it ascended into the night sky, and then it exploded into a burst of red and green stars.

If you want to go out in a glorious display, that's pretty spectacular. But that's nothing compared to the glory that God intends for those of us who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. We are called to live for His glory by seeking His presence as we walk this earth with great power, as shining lights, with His preeminence in our hearts. God created us for nothing less. On the day the awesome call of the trumpet is sounded, the majestic voice of Jesus will call us from our graves. And in glorious resurrected bodies, like Jesus Himself, we will ascend to the clouds to meet the King of Kings, with the brightness of His glory shining from east to west. For that is the purpose for which we were created – today and forever. That purpose is our purpose: God's glory. Amen!

APPENDIX THREE

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

This is a sermon that was delivered by Rev. Lee Botzet to the inmates of Jackson Correctional Institution in Black River Falls, Wisconsin on Friday April 2, 2004 and to the inmates of Stanley Correctional Institution in Stanley, Wisconsin on Friday May 20, 2005.

Some years ago, in a huge lecture hall at Ohio State University was filled with over 1000 students who were preparing to take their final text in Calculus. The teacher of the class, this particular calculus instructor, wasn't very well liked. He was one of those guys who would stand at the front of the class and would intermittently yell out how much time was remaining before the end of a test. The rest of his time was spent walking up and down and isles and looking over shoulders, making sure that nobody cheated. At the end of the testing time he would shout "Times up!" and everyone was required to immediately hand in their papers, which made for quite a mess, considering that there were so many students in the class.

During this particular final, one student entered the test needing a decent grade to pass the class. His only problem with Calculus was that he did poorly when rushed, and this guy standing in the front of the room barking out how much time was left before the tests had to be handed in was not helping him at all. Since he needed to assure himself of a good grade, he hardly flinched when the professor said, "Time's up! Pencils down. Submit your test sheets to piles at the front of the room." Five minutes turned into ten, ten into twenty, twenty into forty...almost an hour after the test was "officially over", the student finally put down his pencil, gathered up his work, and headed to the front of the hall to submit his final. The whole time, the professor sat at the front of the room, strangely waiting for the student to complete his exam.

"What do you think you're doing?" the professor asked as the student stood in front of him about to put down his exam on one of the neatly stacked piles of exams. Clearly the professor had waited only to give the student a hard time. "Turning in my exam," said the student. "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you," the professor gloated, "Your exam is an hour late. You've failed it and, consequently, I'll see you next term when you repeat my course." The student smiled slyly and asked the professor "Do you know who I am?"

"What?" replied the professor gruffly, annoyed that the student showed no sign of emotion.

The student rephrased the question mockingly; "Do you know what my name is?"

"No", snarled the professor.

The student looked the professor dead in the eyes and said slowly, "I didn't think so", as he lifted up one of the stacks half way, shoved his test neatly into the center of the stack, let the stack fall burying his test in the middle, turned around, and walked casually out of the huge lecture hall.

In Jesus' words from Matthew 5:8 – "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" – we face an examination by one who truly knows who we are. None of us will pass the testing of the purity of our hearts as the student from Ohio State University did, because unlike the Calculus professor, God knows who we are. He created us. He knows the true condition of our hearts and our deepest motivations.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." This verse is my life verse. If I were to choose out of all the verses in the Bible that have affected me the most or have had the deepest meaning in my life *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"* would be it. This is also the verse I struggle with the most, because even after a number of years of knowing Jesus as my Lord and Savior, after being called to full time ministry and teaching and preaching and praying and giving my constant sin struggles over to God, the full reality of *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"* still seems to evade me.

Properly expositing we know that the word "pure" here is the word *"katharos"* in the Greek, a word which means "cleansed, unpolluted, completely free from corrupt desire." The word for "heart" here is *"kardia"* which in the original language is defined not just as the physical heart, but as the "center or core of one's being from which comes all physical, emotional, and spiritual life comes." What Jesus is literally saying here is – "blessed are those whose core being, the center of their physical, emotional, and spiritual lives are clean, unpolluted, and completely free from any kind of corrupt desire."

But even in knowing that now, I had already understood the true meaning of *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"* with my soul before I learned it in my mind. My core being, the center of my life, was not clean, was not completely free from any kind of corrupt desire. For years my core being, the center of my life was polluted with self-centeredness, self-importance and self-desire, which in reality was self-deception, self-defilement and self-destructive. For the first 2/3 of my life I was clearly not pure in heart. And so I didn't see God.

The Pharisees among us today would say, "Well Pastor Lee, as a sinner, your heart is still not pure." I would agree with you. God's Word in Jeremiah 17:9 says... *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure."* That being so, in reality none of our hearts are pure. So, in the purest sense, none of us will truly see God, right? Well, that's not the true meaning of this verse. *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"* has nothing to do with spiritual purity or moral cleanliness or behavior which is without stain.

If that were the standard, none of us would ever see God. Romans 3:23 tells us that *"... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Psalm 14:3 says, *"There is no one who does good, not even one."* Psalm 51:5 tells us that we have all been full of sin, right from the time we were born. *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God"* is not about our being pure or clean or unpolluted. It's too late for that. In this verse Jesus is speaking to us about our *MOTIVATIONS*.

What is it that drives you? What drives us? What is it that compels us to do things? What motivates us from deep down within our core beings, the center of our souls? When Jesus said, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*," Jesus was addressing our motivations. We know that's the context that Jesus is speaking in, because he expands this farther on down in the first 18 verses of chapter six.

"Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him." – Matthew 6:1-8

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:16-18

Brothers, Jesus knows our hearts. He knows that we do everything out of a motivation of some kind. And He knows that the *outward* appearance of what we do many times does not always match our *inward* motivations. Contextually, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*" means "blessed are those whose motivations are pure." Whenever the Word of God speaks of the heart, it is speaking of the center, the core, the source of our motivations in life. God knows our hearts. He knows that seldom are our motivations pure and clean and unpolluted, even when we think they are. The reason that's true is because the root of all of our motivations is planted within the soil of deeply sinful hearts. In Matthew 15:19 Jesus said "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."

A hard truth for us. For many of us our spirits are probably rising up right now to fight against this truth. If so that reveals the truth of Hebrews 4:12 that "...the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes... OF THE HEART." Even right now, as we are processing what God is saying to each one of us, He is in the process of judging our thoughts and our attitudes, the motivations of our hearts. Friends, none of us is free from this. Even the most noble conscious motivation becomes polluted by our sinful nature.

In giving generously of our time or money or effort to a good cause, if somehow we are able to steer clear of seeking acknowledgement for that giving, sin will let us bask in the sunshine of our own self-approval. If some sort of sacrifice is demanded upon our lives and we follow through to that calling, the evil from deep within our hearts will speak to us and let us know what a great thing it is we have done. Sin will twist the motivation of even the most pure of those who preach God's Word. The famous preacher D. L Moody was once told by someone that he had preached a great message one Sunday. Moody replied "Thank you but the devil already told me that as I was coming down the pulpit steps."

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" strikes at our softest underbellies. It reveals the true depth of our sin, in spite of the masks we wear and the greatest performances we live before God and before one another. Jesus here calls us to the hardest task there is for those who truly follow him: the call to *self-examination*.

Truly examining the motivations of our hearts, brothers, is deeply humbling. Even more humbling is knowing that in spite of our denials God knows our true motivations. I remember as a land surveyor/civil engineer some years back, I worked for a developer who found a way to motivate his employees. For those who put in a lot of hours and did exceptional work, he named streets after them in his housing developments. Kind of reveals the employee's true motivations, doesn't it? It surely wasn't their dedication to their work or their employer.

Probably one of the clearest stories that I've ever heard regarding how sin has warped our motivations comes from a museum some years back. Despite putting up all sorts of "Do Not Touch" signs, the museum was having no success in keeping visitors from touching and ruining priceless furniture and art. But the problem evaporated overnight when a clever museum employee replaced the "Do Not Touch" signs with signs that read: "Caution: Wash Hands After Touching!"

Because we are creations of God who chose sin as our first choice, our motivations will always be polluted or twisted or warped or tainted somehow unless we open ourselves up to an examination before God and accountability to one another. Jesus said that only the pure in heart, only those with pure motivations, will see God.

It is a simple fact of life *that we can see only what our hearts will let us see*. When you and I go outside at night and see a sky full of stars. What we see is what looks like a sky full of pinpoints of little lights. But when an astronomer looks at the stars, because he has examined them more closely with a telescope, he sees constellations and planets and stars. He even knows them by name. When you and I go for a walk in the woods, we see trees and birds and grass and flowers. But when a botanist or a biologist goes for a walk in the woods, they know the names of each plant and animal, and how they're put together and what their purpose is. They have poured their hearts and lives into studying and examining plants and animals more intimately than you or I. When I walk into an antique shop, what I see is junk. But what an antique dealer sees is priceless treasure. Again the simple truth is - *we can only see what our hearts will let us see*.

Consider that our hearts are much like a conduit or a pipe. Paul uses the same analogy in 2 Timothy 2:19-22 when he says..."The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness. Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver VESSELS but also VESSELS of wood and of earthenware and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a VESSEL for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a PURE HEART."

The word "vessel" here is the word "*skyoo'-os*" in the Greek, which means "an instrument." God's Word here clearly calls us to be His "instruments" – His tools, His channels, His conduits, His pipelines through which God can pour out His Spirit, into us and through us. The Bible tells us that this is our purpose in life. In Isaiah 43:7 God tells us "Everyone who is called by My name... whom I have formed, even whom I have made... I have created for My glory." Everyone whom God has called by name into salvation, He has called for the purpose of glorifying Himself. In that same verse God tells us that's why He even created us in the first place. Basically our hearts, our very lives, are to be "pipelines" for God's glory.

That's the reason Paul told Timothy in what we just read that "*everyone who names the name of the Lord... should abstain from wickedness.*" Some seek to "honor" God by seeking to be clean vessels, instruments, pipelines for the glory of the Lord. Others choose to be vessels, instruments, pipelines of "dishonor." What is dishonor? Further on down in 2 Timothy, in chapter 3 verses 2-5, Paul tells us that those who dishonor God are those who are "lovers of themselves... lovers of money... boastful... proud... abusive... disobedient to their parents... ungrateful... unholy... without love... unforgiving... slanderous... without self-control... brutal... not lovers of the good... treacherous... rash... conceited... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God -- having a form of godliness but denying its power."

That's quite a list. Probably something in this list has touched each one of us here. When any of these attitudes of dishonor enter our hearts even for a moment, we are no longer clean vessels through which God can work. Our hearts can become so plugged up with pride or ungratefulness or desire for more money or lack of self-control that we become of no use to God. I've personally known people who, in standing the midst of a great work of God and awesome movement of the Holy Spirit, still for the life of them cannot see God working. The pipelines of their lives, which run from their hearts to God, are so plugged up in their own opinions and agendas and self-centeredness, that they can't see God. "Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a VESSEL for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work... Now flee from youthful (childlike, immature) lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace... with those who call on the Lord from a PURE HEART"

Some years ago after a violent storm one night, a large tree, which over the years had become a stately giant, was found lying across the pathway in a park. Nothing but a splintered stump was left. Closer examination showed that it was rotten at the core because thousands of tiny insects had eaten away at its HEART. The weakness of that tree was not brought on by the sudden storm. It began the very moment the first insect nested within its bark. Brothers, the question begs to be asked today – What is eating away at our hearts? Just like this giant tree, what is within the core of our hearts that will drop us? Sinful motivations will eat away at our souls making them rotten on the inside in spite of what we look like on the outside. Gathering together in this room today means nothing if God is not glorified in our lives the rest of the week. The rest of our lives are an offense to God if we don't love Him more after we've left this room.

Years ago the noted English architect Sir Christopher Wren wrote of supervising the construction of one of the magnificent cathedrals in London. A journalist thought it would be interesting to interview some of the workers, so he chose three and asked them this question. "What are you doing?" The first replied, "I'm cutting stone for 10 shillings a day." The next answered, "I'm putting my 10 hours in everyday on this job." But the third said, "I'm in the service of the architect Sir Christopher Wren, in helping him construct one of London's greatest cathedrals." Friends, our purpose in life on this earth as cross-carrying, self-denying, born again followers of Jesus Christ is to be vessels, instruments, conduits, clean pipelines for God's Holy Spirit. Our sole purpose in life is to glorify God in all that we do. In the 51st Psalm we read that King David, in his worst hour, examined himself before God. In knowing that the motivations of his heart were clear before God, David wrote the following in the first ten verses:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Once a teenager lost a contact lens while playing basketball in his driveway. After a fruitless search, he told his mother the lens was nowhere to be found. Undaunted, she went outside and in a few minutes returned with the lens in her hand. "I really looked hard for that, Mom," said the young man, "How'd you find it?" "We weren't looking for the same thing," his mother replied, "You were looking for a small piece of plastic... I was looking for \$150." What we are looking for in life reveals the true motivations of our hearts. In this same sermon on the Mount, in Matt 6:21 Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Both the hummingbird and the vulture fly over our nation's deserts. All vultures see is rotting meat, because that is what they look for. They thrive on that diet. But hummingbirds steer clear and ignore the smelly flesh of dead animals. Instead they look for the colorful blossoms of desert plants for the sweet nectar they provide. *The vultures live on what was:* they live on the past, they fill themselves with what is dead and gone. *But hummingbirds live on what is today:* they seek the sweetness of what is new: they fill themselves with freshness and life. Each bird finds what it is looking for. Brothers, we will all will find what we are looking for. *Our hearts will find the treasures we seek. We can only see what our hearts will let us see.* What are you looking for today? Are you looking for God? Do you see God? Are you seeking the rotting smelly flesh of that which is dead and gone? Or do you desire new life, a filling of freshness and sweetness of what can be?

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” is my life verse because I was raised on the smelly rotting flesh of dead life. I’ve been there; I can smell a self-centered motivated heart a mile away because I grew up in that. I lived the dead life for the first 2/3 of my existence. But today, that stuff makes me sick to my stomach. I am now feeding on the risen body and the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. I want life and I want it for an eternity. And I know I’ve got it, because Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. That’s mine and nobody can ever take that away from me, ever.

I spend a lot of time before the Lord now, examining myself. Sometimes I don’t like what I see. Being a sinner it’s my tendency to wander. Until I die and go home I will always struggle with that. I still struggle with purity of heart. I have a hard time seeing God. But sometimes I do see Him. Sometimes I get a glimpse of His glory in my own life. Sometimes I feel the joy of a pure heart. And it’s all because Jesus loves me unconditionally. If He didn’t, I’d be in trouble.

The deepest desire of my life, is to see God. And not just to see Him physically with my eyes, but I want to see God in my heart and in my life. Someday when I stand in glory, I know that will be true. But I don’t want to wait, I want it now. *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”* If I were to have another life verse it would be Psalm 51:10 *“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”* Pretty much a reflection of Matthew 5:8.

I just want you to know that I’m no better or worse than the rest of you. I need God just as much as anybody else. The hardest part about being a pastor is that not only am I called to open my heart up to God, He also calls me to open up my heart before you. That’s hard. But I pray that regardless of what you may see as you examine me – and as we examine one another – that you will see me and I’ll see you and we’ll see one another with the same love that God sees us.

God knows my heart. God knows your heart too. He knows all of our hearts. He knows all of our motivations. God calls us to seek purity of heart, to be honorable vessels for the working of His Spirit. As it says in 2 Timothy we are to be “sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.” We are to “flee from lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace and call on the Lord from a PURE HEART.”

As we close, take some time and open up your heart to Him. Allow God to examine your heart and your motivations. Ask Him to clearly show you any impure, any polluted, any self-centered motivation that has taken root in your heart. Pray that God would remove anything that is keeping you from seeing Him. As we sing allow Him to clean you out. I pray God would cleanse all of our hearts, and that His spirit would have full reign in our lives to glorify the name of Jesus in whatever way He desires. Let us together see God.

APPENDIX FOUR

WHO IS ROMANS 7:14-25 DESCRIBING?

Downloaded from <http://www.tstonramp.com/~kristin/Articles/romans/rom7chart.htm>

Who is Romans 7:14-25 Describing?

Date	The Mature Christian	The Immature Christian	The Non-Christian
2nd Century			Irenaeus (2nd century church father, bishop of Lyons).
			Tertullian (2nd century church father and Christian theologian).
3rd Century			Origen (3rd century church father in Alexandria, Egypt).
4th Century			Ambrose (4th century pastor and bishop of Milan).
			John Chrysostom (4th century church father in Antioch).
5th Century	Augustine (5th century Christian theologian)		Theodore of Mopsuestia (5 th century church father, bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia).
16th Century	Martin Luther (16th century Protestant Reformer).		Theodoret of Cyrus (5 th century church father who was part of the Counsel of Chalcedon).
	John Calvin (16th century Protestant Reformer).		Arminius (Late 16th century Dutch Protestant Reformer).
18th Century	Matthew Henry (18th century Bible teacher and author of <i>Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible</i>).		John Wesley (18th century Anglican preacher and founder of the Methodist movement).
19th Century	C. I. Scofield, (19th century dispensational theologian, editor of the <i>Scofield Reference Bible</i>).	D. Lloyd-Jones (19th century Bible teacher at Westminster Chapel in London).	G. Campbell Morgan (19th century Bible teacher and pastor at Westminster Chapel in London).
	John Murray (19th century Reformed theologian at Westminster Theological Seminary, author of the <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i> Romans)		John Nelson Darby (19th century Plymouth Brethren theologian).

			A. T. Robertson (19th century Southern Baptist New Testament scholar at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary).
			F. L. Godet (19th century Swiss Protestant theologian and New Testament theologian).
20th Century	John Walvoord (20th century dispensational theologian at Dallas Theological Seminary).	F. F. Bruce (20th century New Testament theologian and author of the <i>Tyndale</i> commentary on Romans).	
	C. E. B. Cranfield (20th century Reformed theologian at University of Durham and author of the <i>International Critical Commentary</i> on Romans).	John R. W. Stott (20th century Bible teacher at All Souls Church in London and author of <i>The Bible Speaks Today</i> commentary on Romans).	James Denney (Early 20th century New Testament scholar in the Church of Scotland).
	Kent Hughes (20th century Bible teacher and author of <i>Preach the Word</i> commentary on Romans).	Warren Wiersbe (20th century Bible Teacher at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and author of the "Be" commentaries on the Bible).	Anthony Hoekema (20th century Reformed theologian at Calvin Seminary).
	Charles Swindoll (20th century Bible teacher and president at Dallas Theological Seminary).	Charles Ryrie (20th century Bible teacher at Dallas Theological Seminary and author of the <i>Ryrie Study Bible</i>).	Paul Achtemeier (20th century Protestant theologian and author of the <i>Interpretation</i> commentary on Romans).
	John MacArthur (20th century Bible teacher and president of the Master's Seminary).	David Needham (20th century author of the book <i>Birthright</i>).	Gordon Fee (20th century New Testament scholar at Regent College).

	J. I. Packer (20th century Puritan theologian at Regent College).		Manfreid Brauch (20th century New Testament theologian at Easter Baptist Theological Seminary and author of <i>Hard Sayings of Paul</i>).
	James D. G. Dunn (20th century New Testament scholar at University of Durham and author of the <i>Word Biblical Commentary</i> on Romans).		N. T. Wright (20th century New Testament scholar).
			Joseph Fitzmyer (20th century Roman Catholic New Testament scholar and author of the <i>Anchor Bible Commentary</i> on Romans).
			Douglas Moo (20th century New Testament scholar at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and author of the <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i> - Romans)

Arguments For the Various Positions

I. The Case for Romans 7:14-25 describing Mature Christians.

1. Paul uses the present tense to describe the struggle. This indicates that his current experience as an apostle included this struggle.
2. Even after Jesus Christ's deliverance is mentioned in v. 25, the battle is not resolved. Being a Christian does not make this battle cease. In fact, only the Christian is truly aware of the battle raging in his or her own soul.
3. Only a true Christian can be said to "rejoice" in God's law (v. 22) and "desire" to obey God's law (vv. 14-23). The "natural person" is at enmity with God, thus cannot be said to love God's law.
4. The emphasis on "the body of sin" in v. 24 suggests that the battle will only be resolved after the believer's physical resurrection.
5. Most Christians identify with the struggle Paul describes.

II. The Case for Romans 7:14-25 describing Immature Christians.

In addition to the above five arguments:

1. The word "unspiritual" in v. 14 is used to describe "carnal" Christians in 1 Corinthians 3:1. Thus the battle described is that of a "carnal Christian" who has not yet understood the role of God's Spirit in conquering sin.

2. The battle described in chapter 7 is not compatible with the victorious life described in Romans 6 and 8. Christians must leave Romans 7 behind and actualize Romans 7 and 8 in their lives (This is especially emphasized by Needham in *Birthright*).

III. The Case for Romans 7:14-25 describing Non-Christians who are living under the Law of Moses.

1. The theme of all of chapter 7 is the goodness yet inadequacy of the law of Moses to conquer sin. The struggle is best understood in its context as describing a person still under the law of Moses.
2. The continuity with vv. 1-13 suggests that Paul is describing his own life as a Jewish Pharisee prior to coming to faith in Christ.
3. The present tense is often used in koine Greek to refer to the past in a vivid manner (See any Greek grammar for this, especially A. T. Robertson's *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, Dana and Mantey's *Greek Grammar*, Porter's *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, and Brooks and Winbery's *Syntax of New Testament Greek*).
4. The contrast between chapter 7 and chapter 8 make it difficult to believe that both are describing the same experience. Clearly chapter 7 is marked with defeat, while chapter 8 is marked by victory.
5. Nowhere does chapter 7 mention the Holy Spirit, and in chapter 8 the Holy Spirit is presented as the key to the Christian life.
6. "Rejoicing" in God's law and "desiring" to obey God's law accurately describes Paul as a non-Christian Jew and other Jewish people of Paul's generation. The Jewish people sincerely wanted to obey God's law. However, Paul's point seems to be that the law itself did not provide any resources for fulfilling the law.
7. Based on Paul's claim in 6:17-18, a Christian cannot be described as a "slave to sin," yet the person in Romans 7 is called a "slave to sin" in v. 14 and v. 25. If chapter 7 is describing Paul as a Christian, this would seem to make Paul contradict himself, for a Christian cannot be no longer a slave to sin and still a slave to sin simultaneously.
8. If the struggle is describing that of a Christian, then it would appear that when one becomes a Christian, God only supplies believers with the desire to do good, not the will to do so. Verse 18 indicates that Paul *cannot* obey God, not that it is merely very hard.

APPENDIX FIVE

THE SUPREMACY AND SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN SALVATION

This is a sermon that was delivered to the congregation at Salem Baptist Church, Eau Claire, Wisconsin on Sunday February 20, 2005, by their Senior Pastor, Rev. Lee Botzet.

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. (Romans 11:36)

A few years ago James Fallow, a correspondent for the Atlantic Monthly, reported in his magazine that he came across a display in a large Japanese department store which featured Santa Claus holding the infant Jesus, behind a sleigh pulled by the seven dwarfs. Apparently Americans are now exporting their theological confusion to other countries. The Great Commission seems to have become the Great Confusion in taking to heart the words of Harry Truman; "If you can't convince them, confuse them."

Not long ago the Radio Bible Class gathered together a sampling of opinions from those who claim to be Christians regarding how one gets to heaven. The question brought out a variety of confusing answers: "God doesn't send anyone to hell" (New York), "I'll cross that bridge when I get there" (Boston), "Just believe in God" (Miami), "There is nothing I can do about it" (New Jersey), "Keep the Ten Commandments" (San Francisco), "Be kind to other people. Be a good person" (Gainesville).

This great confusion regarding how to get to heaven has to do with the great confusion about who God truly is. But while the world may be confused about who God is, those who claim the name of Christ should not be confused. Remember from last week that the Bible puts before us three categories of principles in life: things that are right, things that are wrong, and things that are issues of freedom and preference. God's Word teaches us things that are right about God; anything else we believe about God that is not in the Bible is wrong. What we believe about God is foundational to everything in life.

Remember also from last week that the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome because there were some in the church who were divided over issues of personal opinion and individual preference. They were making the non-essentials of the faith essentials; that which was unclear or not spoken of in the scriptures was being held up as absolute truth. In our day the same thing is happening in many quarters within the community of faith. Strangely, and specifically, for born-again, Bible believing, evangelical followers of Jesus Christ – there seems to be a great deal of confusion about the issue of the process of how one comes to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, even more specifically about God's role and human responsibility, about God's will and our will in the course of coming to faith.

The Bible, the Word of God, does speak clearly about the issue of who God is - and about the issue of God's role and the role human responsibility in the process of salvation. But where the confusion comes is when we try to understand it all. An infinite God and His

infinite ways are beyond our finite human understanding. As God Himself says to us in Isaiah 55:8-9: "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways', declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"

What this means is that sometimes we will encounter truths in the Bible which are clearly taught but which seem contradictory to our fallible human minds. For example, the Bible clearly teaches that there is one God who exists in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In reality this is more than our finite human minds can grab a hold of. We can use the analogy for the trinity like - I am one person who is three: I am a father, a son, and a husband. But this breaks down when you consider that I cannot separate myself into three separate individual persons, in order to talk and interact and work together like God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit can.

Another example would be the truth that the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was both fully God and fully human when he walked on this earth. If we try and say that Jesus was half man and half God when he came to earth, then we are diminishing His divinity by 50%, which the Bible clearly does not support. Somehow Jesus was both 100% God and 100% human, both at the same time. Even though our minds have trouble understanding how this is possible, these facts are clearly taught in Scripture and so these are two absolute divine truths which are held in tension by God's divine understanding.

Some folks try to explain these kinds of tensions in Scripture by defining them as paradoxes. But a paradox is defined as "a figure of speech, a play on words that forms a statement that seems to unite two opposite ideas," and divine biblical truths which are in tension are not figures of speech or plays on words, but rather two statements of fact from God Himself which are in a relationship of truth to one another. While our human minds cannot solve the fact the Jesus was both God and man, it is an unavoidable fact we must live with. While we cannot fully explain the triune relationship of the trinity, God can because He is the Godhead of the Trinity, and He said it, and so it is a reality.

The best and most understandable term for this is "divine truth in tension" because these are divine truths of God, and because God's ways and understanding are higher than ours. In reality this issue of divine truth in tension is something that could be the fuel for many months worth of preaching and teaching. But it is my intent in our short time together this morning to plant some small seeds of trust in God's supremacy and sovereignty in your heart and mind concerning the divine truth in tension as it applies to the will of God and the will of man in the process of coming to a saving faith in Christ. For me it's been a long journey in coming to understand that there are divine truths in tension in the Bible, and it continues to be a labor of brokenness and humility and love to surrender and submit to what God's Word says regarding God's supremacy and sovereignty in life and about my faith in Jesus Christ. What I have found is that what the Bible says about God's will and human will in salvation did not fit perfectly into my experience of being baptized Catholic, raised charismatic, and confirmed a Lutheran. Neither does it neatly fit into the Armenian theology of the fundamentalist church I came to faith in, nor into the Calvinism of many of my friends. Baptists struggle with this too.

Over time, as follower of Jesus Christ, and as an evangelist and pastor, I've found the best position to hold is 1) to believe what the Bible says most clearly, 2) to reject what the Bible doesn't say, and 3) to live with those things that are divine truths in tension. In doing so I've been accused of being both a hyper-Calvinist and a post-modern Armenian – and both of those sides will take issue with what I will be preaching this morning. And if you don't know what that means, you are truly blessed by God with ignorance which you need to hold onto dearly. Let God's Word, not your opinion, speak for itself.

The Bible, the Word of God puts before us six principles regarding God's role and the place of human responsibility in the process of coming to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. We start with God Himself.

I. First of all, the truth of God's Word reveals the *God is supreme and sovereign over and in all things.* Romans 11:36 tells us that, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." The basic foundational principle of Christianity is that God is supreme and sovereign over and in all things. The sovereignty of God means that God is absolutely and unconditionally independent over the whole of finite creation. God appoints the course of nature and directs the course of history down to the minutest details. His decrees are eternal, unchangeable, holy, wise and totally sovereign. "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Psalm 115:3); "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"' (Dan. 4:35).

The God of the Bible is the holy, ruling, limitless, acting, all-powerful God Who makes nations to rise and to fall, Who alone accomplishes His plans and purposes, and Who redeems His people for the glory of His name. God is Spirit, He is infinite without measure, eternal without time, immutable and unchanging, one in unity, omnipresent and everywhere, omniscient and knows all things. God is free and independent, omnipotent and all powerful, just and moral, benevolent and caring, graceful and forgiving, good and merciful, holy and perfect, providential, righteous, truth, loving, faithful, and the Creator. God is the God of Life. God is the God of Death. God is the God of Life after death.

A story is told about a cowboy who once went to buy some life insurance. The broker asked him if he had had any accidents in the past year, to which the cowboy replied "No. But I was kicked by a horse and chased by a bull and then bitten by a snake - that laid me up for a while." The insurance agent said, "Weren't those accidents?" To which the cowboy replied, "No, they did it on purpose." The dictionary defines 'accident' as "an unforeseen event or one without apparent cause." Any Christian who understands the sovereignty of God knows that there is no such thing as an accident. God rules over everything. Amid all the apparent defeats and inconsistencies of our sinful human lives, God is actually controlling all things in His undisturbed majesty. Even the sinful actions of men, women, and children can occur only by His permission and only by the strength that He gives.

Every thinking person knows that God is sovereign over their life. God didn't ask us whether we wanted to exist or not. God didn't ask us when or where we would be born, whether now or before the Flood, whether male or female, whether white or black, whether in America or China or Africa. All of those things God sovereignly decided for us. God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe; He is the ultimate source of all power that is found in the world. Nothing can come to pass apart from His sovereign will. Otherwise He would not be GOD. God is supreme and sovereign over all things.

"You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3); "I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other" (Isaiah 42:8); "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me" (Isaiah 46:9); "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all" (1 Chronicles 29:11). There is no divine tension of truth here. The Bible clearly tells us that there is only one God and He is supreme and sovereign God over all things.

II. Secondly, in contrast to the supremacy and sovereignty of God over and in all things, the truth of God's Word tells us that *sinful humanity is radically depraved*. "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:10-12). Because of the fall, sinful humanity is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; our hearts are deceitful and desperately corrupt. Our wills are not free, but in bondage to our fallen nature. Therefore when given the choice, we will not choose good over evil.

Humanity's rebellion against God is total not in its depth but in rather in its width. Human beings are not intensely sinful, but sin has extended into our entire being. The effect of the fall is that sin has extended to every part of our personality – our physical body, our thinking, our emotions, our spirits and our will. Even when it appears that we are doing things which are morally good, because sin has infected our hearts and souls - our motives and our thoughts and our intents and our agendas are somewhat bent away from God towards the fulfillment and satisfaction of self. The Bible calls this sin.

Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 6:23 then says "The wages of sin is death." Because of the fall, we are all helpless and dead in our sin. Because sin extends into every area of our lives, we are therefore totally deserving of the eternal punishment of death. Since we all - men and women and children - are dead in our sins, it is impossible for us to desire to make the moral and spiritual choices which God requires, whether it be for salvation or for everyday life. This is our natural condition apart from God's grace. Terrorism, racism, war, abortion, aberrant sexuality, political division, cultural immorality, and spiritual self-centeredness are all proof of this. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9); "There is none who does good, not even one" (Psalm 14:3); "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:7-8). The truth of the Word of God and the reality of life itself reveals that sinful humanity is radically depraved in nature.

III. Third, the Bible reveals to us that when God calls those who are radically depraved in their sinful nature, *His grace is irresistible*. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:1-10).

Since we are all dead in sin, we cannot respond to God unless He enables us to overcome our sinful rebellion. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that radically depraved sinful hearts are awakened and then respond to the call of salvation. Our salvation is entirely due to the grace of God. This means by a special call of God's grace the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely and willingly to Jesus Christ. God's grace, therefore, is invincible; it never fails to result in the salvation of those to whom it is extended.

A spiritually dead person can no more give himself spiritual life than a physically dead person can give himself physical life. Physical and spiritual resurrection requires a supernatural act on the part of God. We get into the family of God in precisely the same way that we get into our human family, by being born into it. By that supernatural act God Himself, through His Holy Spirit, sovereignly takes us out of the kingdom of this world and places us in His spiritual kingdom by a spiritual rebirth.

But it's here where we find ourselves facing a divine truth in tension. While God is supreme over all resistance, and while it is by the Holy Spirit that we are awakened and then empowered to respond to the call of Christ, the Bible still tells us we are still accountable to respond to that call. Though God is sovereign in His calling and empowering us to faith in Christ, we have a responsibility to answer His call. The Bible tells us that the guilt of sin, unbelief and rejecting of Christ is placed on humans, not on God. In John 3:19 Jesus said, "This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil" and in John 5:40 he said, "You refuse to come to me that you may have life." The tension we face here is that God's grace is irresistible yet when we do resist we are responsible and accountable. God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours.

The great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon wrestled with this divine truth in tension, and spoke of it in his autobiography. He writes: "Born, as all of us are by nature . . . I still believed the old things I had heard continually from the pulpit, and did not see the grace of God. When I was coming to Christ, I thought I was doing it all myself, and though I

sought the Lord earnestly, I had no idea the Lord was seeking me . . . I can recall the very day and hour when first I received those truths in my own soul—when they were, as John Bunyan says, burnt into my heart as with a hot iron . . . One week-night, when I was sitting in the house of God . . . The thought struck me, ‘How did you come to be a Christian?’ I sought the Lord. "But how did you come to seek the Lord?" The truth flashed across my mind in a moment—I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence in my mind to make me seek Him. I prayed, thought I, but then I asked myself, How came I to pray? I was induced to pray by reading the Scriptures. How came I to read the Scriptures? I did read them, but what led me to do so? Then, in a moment, I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the Author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me, and from that doctrine I have not departed to this day, and I desire to make this my constant confession, ‘I ascribe my change wholly to God.’"

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44); "To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13); "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14); "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (Romans 9:16). When God extends His grace to us, it is irresistible.

IV. Fourth, God's Word teaches that by God's irresistible grace the work of God in Christ on the cross *effectually accomplished salvation for all of God's people*. "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?" (Romans 9:20-24). The Bible here is telling us that God's saving grace is not for everyone.

There is great controversy and emotion in regards to the extent or the width or the broadness of the atonement for sins made on the cross of Christ. Some say that the offer of the gospel of Christ is for everyone in the world, while others argue that it's only for those whom God calls and responds to His irresistible grace. Most of this controversy centers around the word "*all*" in the Bible. A good example is 1 Timothy 2:4 & 6 which say that God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" and Jesus "gave himself as a ransom for all." At first glance it might seem that the Bible is speaking of everyone in the whole world, but a little more information might help you sort this out.

1) Know that "*all*" in the Bible oftentimes means, not all men without exception, but all kinds of men without distinction - Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, men and women, rich and poor. Mark 1:5 tells us that when John the Baptist appeared that "*all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem*" came out and were baptized. But we know not every person

or every individual did so. 2) Know that oftentimes the word "*all*" means all those whom God has chosen, the elect, all those whom God calls and empowers to respond. And 3) know that sometimes "*all*" does mean everyone in the whole world.

Here's the real key: the New Testament was written the Greek language which is highly and much, much more contextual than our English language. The word "*all*" can only be truly understood within the context of what is being written. Unless you have studied and are trained in Biblical Greek, you will fall into error if you seek to press your opinions into God's truth. And so we are faced with the question: Did Jesus die for everyone? Is the offer of salvation for everyone in the world? Well, we know two things to be true:

1) We know that not everyone will be saved. "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13-14). Salvation is not universal; not everyone goes to heaven. The Bible doesn't tell us why God does not save everyone when we are all equally undeserving. But the Bible does tell us that the payment for our sins came at an enormous cost to God Himself, that God can do whatever He chooses to do, and that salvation is by grace, which is irresistible and thus triumphs over all human resistance.

2) We know that God's Word calls us to share the saving gospel of Christ with everyone. "The gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations" (Mark 13:10). In John 6:37 Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." There is an argument that says that Christ's death on the cross was not a death of potential atonement for all people. But what we know for sure is that only God knows whom He has called to respond to the good news of the gospel and so every person we meet is an opportunity to fulfill the calling of God in someone's life to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours.

God is the potter and we are the clay and we have no right to question whom He decides to call to Himself. Our part in all this is not to be the potter but the clay, so that He might mold us and use us to "to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory." God created this world as a theater in which He would display His glory, for all of His creatures to see and admire - His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. When it comes to salvation we see His justice. God's justice demands that goodness must be rewarded and that sin must be punished, and it's just as necessary that sin be punished as it is that goodness be rewarded. The blood of Christ is so sufficient and precious that all would be saved if all were called to salvation. "Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4); "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15); "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25); "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Hebrew 10:14); "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me. . . I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours" (John 17:6, 9). The cross saved those who are God's.

V. Fifth, the Bible tells us that saving faith is a gift from God, *given to whom He chooses*. "For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills" (Romans 9:15-18).

Because we are sinful human beings who are radically depraved in our nature, our ability to choose according to God's will and standards is completely dependent upon God. We have been given the ability to make choices in life, choices which are real and have meaning. But God's Word never tells us that our choices are free from God's influence and control. This does not make us puppets or robots; we are real people created in God's image, who make voluntary choices based on our own preferences and wants, and God allows us to make genuine choices that have real effects on our lives.

While this may seem to be another divine truth in tension, the tension is eased by the fact that the overwhelming emphasis in God's Word regarding God's absolute sovereignty over and in all things reveals that - *our human ability to make choices in life is not absolute*. The freedom we have to make choices and act out on those choices is always according to God's plan and purpose and will. "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps" (Proverbs 16:9); "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." (Romans 8:28-30).

A.W. Tozer used an illustration for this divine truth in tension: "An ocean liner leaves New York bound for Liverpool, England. Its destination has been determined by proper authorities. Nothing can change it. This is at least a faint picture of sovereignty. On board the ship are scores of passengers. These are not in chains, neither are their activities determined for them by decree. They are completely free to move about as they will. They eat, sleep, play, lounge about on the deck, read, talk, altogether as they please; but all the while the ocean liner is carrying them steadily onward toward a predetermined port (which they have accepted as their destination). Both freedom and sovereignty are present here, and they do not contradict. So it is, I believe, with man's freedom and the sovereignty of God. The mighty ocean liner of God's sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history."

When it comes to salvation the Bible tells us that God gives faith unconditionally and not on the basis of human actions or human works or of a foreseen faith that humans produce by some power of self-determination through free will. This does not rule out, however, man's responsibility to respond to the call of faith. The real divine truth in tension here is the tension between God's sovereignty in salvation, and man's responsibility to respond in belief. This tension is not fully resolved in the Bible.

God's ways and thoughts are higher than ours. Human actions are not the catalyst to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. We know that we can do nothing good by "*human will or exertion*" that we might come to faith in Jesus, but rather that the good we do comes as a result of coming to faith in Jesus. Bearing fruit for God is an indication that God has sown seeds of irresistible grace in the fertile soil of your heart.

God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in God's own sovereign will. His choice was not based on any foreseen response of obedience on their part, such as faith or repentance, not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. Those whom God chooses He brings to faith in Christ through the power of the Spirit to a willing acceptance of Christ. This elective process of God is referred to some 25 times in the Bible. God's Word clearly tells us that the gift of eternal life is not conferred upon all men, but only upon those whom God chooses. This truth runs against the grain of the entitlement culture and self centered "right to choose" society we live in. Even the argument that God chooses us based on our choice of Him beforehand (which cannot be proven grammatically or contextually) flows out of this mindset.

The argument that election gives the picture of a cruel God who predestines people to hell is a gross caricature, as God does not need to do so - since we are all born sinners who are condemned to hell: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). The divine truth is God saves all who want to be saved, but no one whose sinful nature has not been changed by God wants to be saved. God chooses people out of His deep and sometimes mysterious sovereign love.

"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:44); "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide" (John 15:16); "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48); "Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened" (Romans 11:7); "No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (John 6:65).

VI. Sixth, since our salvation is all from our most sovereign God, the truth of God's Word reveals to us that *salvation by God's sovereign grace cannot be lost*. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (John 10:27-29). To belong to God's chosen people is to be eternally secure. Those whom God calls out of radical depravity, whom God regenerates by His irresistible grace, whom God redeems by the cross of Christ, whom God chooses by His sovereign purpose for the glory of His name - He also keeps, so that they will not totally and finally fall away from the gift of God's faith and grace.

In Christ we are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God to persevere to the end. Having once been born onto the kingdom of God, we can never become unborn. Since it took a supernatural act to bring us into a state of spiritual life, it would take another supernatural act to take us out of that state. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God" (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). Only God could take away our salvation and He has promised He will not do so. If it is all of God's work then we will providentially be kept by the power of God throughout all the trials and difficulties of life and will be brought into the heavenly kingdom.

"Those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called he also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified" (Romans 8:30); "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27-28); "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6); "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39).

God's Word teaches us that salvation ultimately is not in our hands. While the choices of humanity are crucial, they are not the final, decisive power that brings people to glory. Salvation is only by our supreme God's sovereign grace. There may be a number of divine truths in tension in the reality that God is supreme and sovereign over and in the process of salvation. But once embraced, these truths will drive you to stand in awe of who God is, and lead you ever deeper into true God-centered worship.

These truths will compel you to quit pursuing your value and worth through avenues of prosperity and accomplishment as you marvel at the mystery and glory of who you are and what God has given you and what God done for you in Jesus Christ. These truths make you cry out in pain over the sin and evil in our world, and cause you so fall on your knees before the throne of God and seek both His mercy and His power to both battle and overcome the darkness with the light of Christ. These truths, though in divine tension, allow us to passionately and joyfully know that God will triumph in the end.

Brothers and sisters, these six principles were quite foreign to me when I came to faith and Christ, and even for sometime after, as I believed in the freedom of my will over the sovereignty of God. I will confess that I did not learn about human free will from the Bible, but rather from the independent, self-sufficient, self-centered atmosphere of American Christianity. For me the sovereignty of God meant that God could do whatever I gave him permission to do. The problem is, while that might fit my opinion and my personal experience, it doesn't fit the fullness of what Scripture says, nor does it fit the reality of our faith, nor does it give joy and freedom and victory. The supremacy and sovereignty of God's grace in salvation is the only hope of victory we can know over our rebellious human will.

In the 1800's there lived in Chicago a successful attorney by the name of Horatio Spafford. Spafford was intelligent, successful, and godly man. He loved God, his family and his church. Life was good for he and his family until early in 1871, when Spafford's only son died. A few months later his real estate investments were totally wiped out during the great Chicago Fire. Wanting to take some time to get his life back together, Spafford planned a trip to Europe with his family, a trip that was going to coincide with an evangelistic crusade led by his good friend D.L. Moody.

At the last minute, a business development delayed him, and so Spafford sent his family ahead as scheduled, deciding to catch up with them later. Tragically the ship his family was on hit another ship and sank in just twenty minutes. All four of his daughters drowned, but his wife survived. Taken to Wales his wife cabled back home just two words, "Saved alone." Spafford immediately boarded a ship to meet her. The captain, in knowing Spafford's sorrow, stopped the ship where Spafford's daughters had drowned.

Horatio didn't understand why he had lost all he owned and loved. God's thoughts and ways were not his ways. But on that day, at the very spot he lost his four daughters, he trusted in the supremacy and sovereignty of God over and in all things. It was there that he wrote "sorrows like sea billows roll." It was there that he knew God "regarded his helpless estate" in Jesus Christ and wrote "It is well, It is well with my soul." These words later became a well known hymn. I pray today the supremacy and sovereignty of God would joyfully invade your hearts and you would know it is well with your soul. Amen.

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VITA

Leland Gregory Botzet was born in St. Paul, Minnesota on May 25, 1954. He grew up in Twin Cities area, and after graduating from Mounds View High School, he served in the United States Air Force. Following his honorable discharge in 1975, he completed undergraduate degrees in communications and civil engineering, and worked vocationally for 10 years as a land surveyor in central Minnesota – during which time he came to faith in Jesus Christ. Not long after he helped form the bluegrass gospel group “A Joyful Noise” which traveled throughout the upper Midwest sharing the gospel in churches, prisons, campgrounds, and bluegrass festivals. It was during that time Lee felt the call of God to full time ministry, and pursued that end by attending Bethel Seminary. During his studies he also served as a youth pastor, interim pastor, pastor of evangelism and discipleship, and pulpit supply, ultimately graduating with a Master of Divinity in 1996. Lee then served as senior pastor at Milford Baptist Church in Milford, Iowa, and currently holds the position of lead pastor at Salem Baptist Church in Eau Claire Wisconsin. Over the past 15 years Lee has also served as a crusade evangelist both in the Philippines and the United States; speaker and leader at various pastor’s conferences, men’s retreats, and prayer gatherings; and prison ministry leader, speaker, teacher, and mentor – a ministry which he currently continues to be deeply involved with.

Lee currently lives in Eau Claire, Wisconsin with his wife Nancy – and God has blessed them with three children: Eric, Jennifer, and Micah. He has served as lead pastor of Salem Baptist Church in Eau Claire since January of 2000. Lee entered the Doctorate of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in January of 2004 and graduated in May of 2007.